A Tom Quest Adventure

THE TELLTALE SCAR

By FRAN STRIKER

Author of "THE LONE RANGER" Books

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A TOM QUEST

ADVENTURE

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A Tom Quest Adventure Story

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TOM QUEST, the hero of this new and exciting adventure series by the creator of *The Lone Ranger,* sets out with his two loyal friends, the gargantuan Gulliver, and the crack newspaperman, Whiz Walton, on an expedition deep into unexplored Peru. The trio are searching for Tom's father, Hamilton Quest, the famous scientist-explorer, who had disappeared years before.

When an unknown enemy tries to thwart Tom's plan it becomes obvious that someone definitely does not want Hamilton Quest to be found—dead or alive. More convinced than ever that the solution lies somewhere in Peru, Tom and his friends follow a trail that is filled with hardship and danger.

Deep in the jungle, events march rapidly to a climax, touched off by Tom's discovery of an ugly scar on a native's hand—a telltale scar last seen on a hand thousands of miles away. From then on, action, suspense, and one thrill after another punctuate a book that equals the best of Fran Striker's famous adventure stories.

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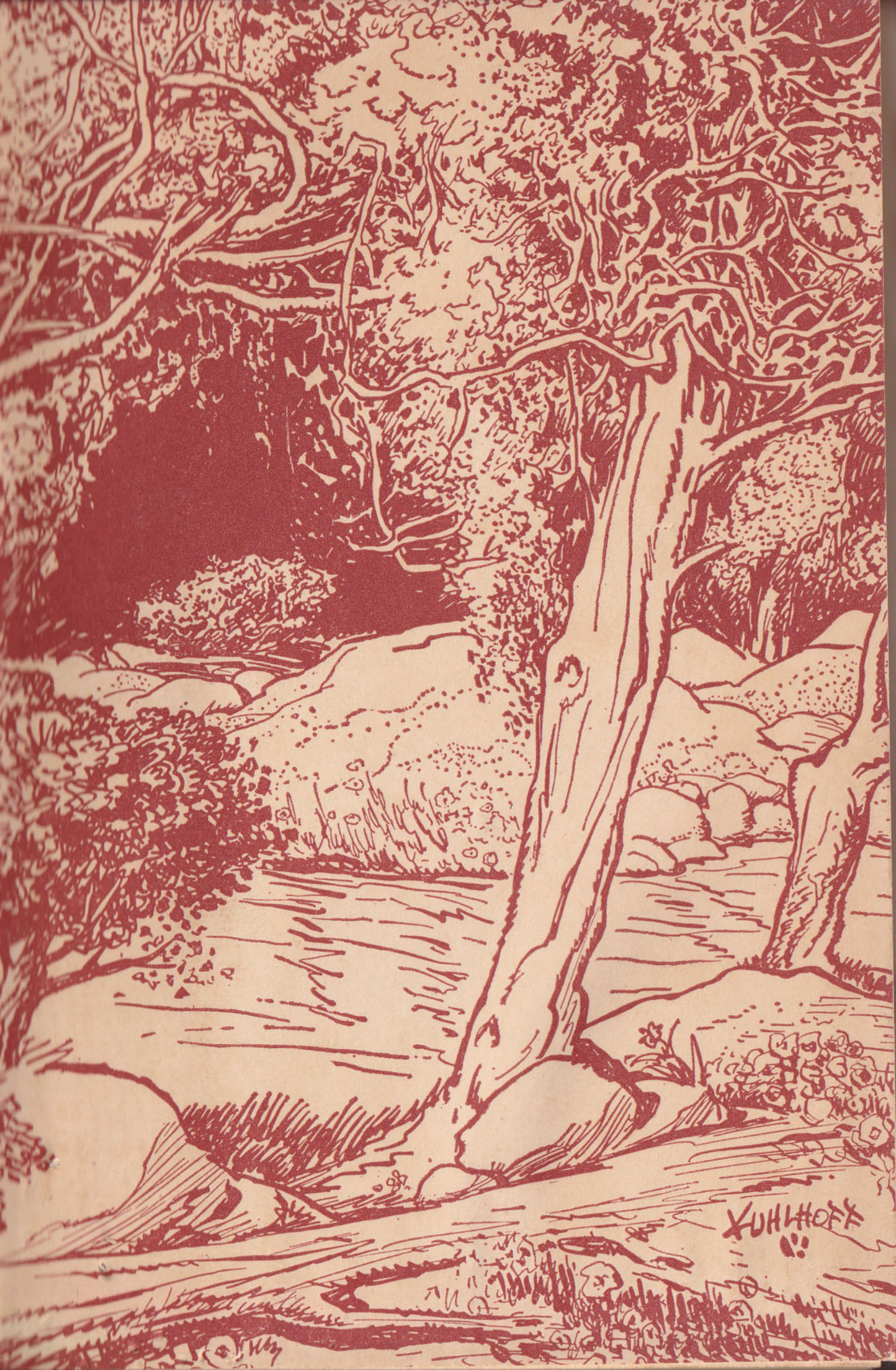
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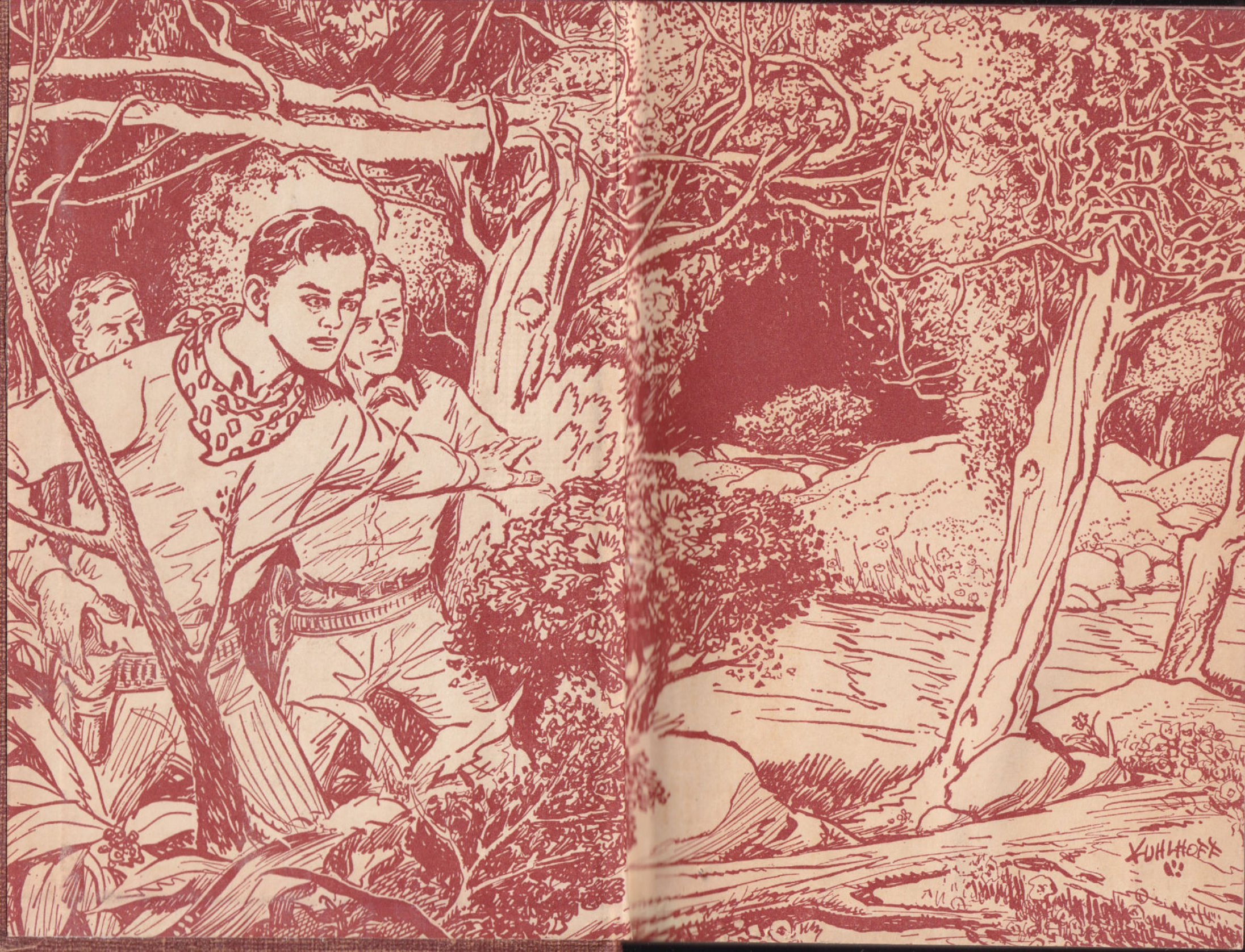
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THE TELLTALE SCAR

Tom heard Whiz Walton speak in a low whisper. "This," muttered the reporter, "looks like the works."

The Telltale Scar

A Tom Quest Adventure

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BY

FRAN STRIKER

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THE TELLTALE SCAR

CHAPTER 1

The Man on Watch

Tom quest swung out of the surging human tide and entered the carpeted lobby of the mid-town hotel. He stopped abruptly and muttered, "Get yourself in check."

He was not himself. He knew it, and he didn't like it.

Too restless to ride in a taxicab, he had walked from Grand Central Station without a sideways or an upward glance. He hadn't noticed that it was one of the hottest June days New York had ever had. His suitcase was heavy, but he hadn't noticed that either.

He felt trembly and overeager. He hadn't felt that way since nervous impatience cost him a fumble in his first football game. The fumble had been excused by the coach, but not by Tom himself. He had, on that day, determined to keep a constant checkrein on his emotions. This determination had developed a self-discipline that would be remarkable in a man at any age but was even more remarkable in a boy of seventeen.

But, after all, Tom Quest's condition was understandable because *this was the day!*

It was the beginning of a trip into the jungles of Peru where Tom hoped to find his father. Now that he knew from John Hanford's confession that Hamilton Quest was alive and a captive somewhere in South America, every moment's delay seemed like a year.

Tom's father, Hamilton Quest, had gone with a large scientific expedition to Peru, taking seven-year-old Tom, his mother and a friend named Gulliver. Tom's mother had died in the camp and Gulliver had brought Tom back to the States. Soon after that the expedition had been attacked by savages and all members of the party were thought to have been killed.

Gulliver had been like a foster parent to the boy. He had placed him in an Eastern school, and kept close watch on his progress. Tom's vacations had been spent in Texas where he learned to ride and shoot on a small ranch owned by Gulliver. For years Tom had clung to a vague hope that his father might in some way have survived the attack of the head-hunters.

Then after ten years John Hanford had returned from the jungle. A skilled engineer, Hanford had been a member of the lost expedition. Tom's faint hope burned anew. If Hanford had survived, perhaps Hamilton Quest, too, might be living somewhere in the jungle. Hanford had returned to civilization with a mysterious need for large sums of money. His efforts to raise over one hundred thousand dollars had brought him into contact with a notorious criminal organization.

Hanford and the rest of his group were now in jail, due

largely to the efforts of Gulliver, Tom Quest and a newspaper columnist named "Whiz" Walton. Readers of *Sign of the Spiral* will recall the memorable scene when Tom and Gulliver were captives of the Ace Carmody gang in the tunnel beneath the ghost town of Horsehead, when they had forced the former engineer to reveal that Hamilton Quest still was alive when he left Peru.

The three had been substantially rewarded. They planned to use the money to go in search of Tom's father.

Now Tom was on the way. He had boarded the train at daybreak and had arrived in New York to meet his friends. He crossed the hotel lobby and grinned at the registration clerk.

"Golly," he said, "it's good to get out of that traffic."

"If it's a room you want, we're full up unless you made a reservation."

Tom looked concerned. "I didn't make a reservation," he said, "but—"

"I'm sorry." The clerk meant it. He liked Tom's natural manner and the friendly look in his clear gray eyes. "New York's pretty crowded right now," he explained. "You see, most of the fellows from schools near here come in to catch a few shows before they go home for the summer."

"But I'm supposed to meet a friend in this hotel. He said you'd have a room for me."

"Is your friend registered here?"

Tom shook his head. "No, I don't think so."

"He told you there'd be a room?"

Tom nodded.

"He may have reserved a room for you," the clerk said,

reaching for a small stack of cards. "What's the name?"

"Walton," Tom replied. "Whiz Walton, the newspaper columnist."

The clerk tossed the cards aside.

"What are you trying to pull on me?" he demanded. "Do you think you can pass yourself off as a famous columnist? If you're Whiz Walton, I'm Santa Claus."

Tom laughed. "I didn't mean that I was Whiz Walton. I thought you were asking the name of my friend. My name is—"

The clerk broke in. "You mean to say you know Whiz Walton?"

He became more affable. He snapped his fingers and said, "Now I've got it! I thought you looked familiar, but I couldn't place you. You're Tom Quest—right?"

Tom showed his surprise. He nodded and said, "Yes, but how did you know?"

"Saw your picture in the paper. You and Walton and another chap."

"His name is Gulliver."

"That's it." The clerk grinned. "Tell me, does Mr. Gulliver really look like his pictures?"

"Gulliver's one of the finest men in the world."

"Sure thing. If the story Walton wrote is true, he must be plenty tough."

The clerk rested his elbows on the desk and leaned forward.

"Tell me," he went on, "did you three really capture that gang in Texas?"

"The police caught them," replied Tom modestly. "We just sort of helped."

"But the three of you split the reward, didn't you?"

Tom nodded. He felt a little embarrassed at the clerk's attention. "About that room—" he said.

"Yes, indeed, we're holding a room for you. One for Mr. Gulliver, too. Here, fill out this card."

The clerk pushed a white card across the desk and handed Tom a fountain pen.

"I'm glad," Tom said as he signed his name, "that Gulliver is going to be in the same hotel."

"We've put you and Mr. Gulliver in adjoining rooms."

"Good."

"Have you any idea when he'll arrive?"

Tom handed back the fountain pen and said, "He promised to be here today."

"What train?"

"He's not coming by train. He's driving his car."

"From Texas?"

Tom nodded.

The clerk chuckled and said, "I hope he gets here while I'm on duty. I'd like to see him." Then he became serious. He lowered his voice and went on, "By the way, a man's been asking for you."

"Who?"

"I don't know. He didn't give his name."

"What did he look like?"

"He was short and heavy-set. I'd say he was middle-aged."

Tom shook his head slowly. "I can't think of anyone like that," he said.

"He wore a blue suit. It was a little shiny and baggy. He looked like a private detective."

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sure he's no one I know."

"If he comes back, shall I tell him you're in?"

"Of course," Tom replied. "Why not?"

The clerk nodded and signaled a bellhop. "Mr. Quest," he said. "Room 307."

A short, stocky man, wearing a shiny, blue serge suit, sat in an obscure corner of the lobby where he could watch the desk without being noticed by the clerk. As a further precaution, he kept a newspaper opened in front of his face.

There was a rip in the newspaper. It might have been an accidental tear, but accidental or not, it served as a peephole. Through this slit the stocky man watched Tom Quest follow the uniformed bellboy to an elevator. He waited until the door of the lift had closed, then folded his paper and sauntered casually to the public telephones.

He squeezed into a booth, dropped a coin into the slot and dialed a number. When his party answered, he said, "This is Croyden speaking. Tom Quest has just checked in."

At the other end of the line a voice said, "Thank you. I'll send you my check tomorrow."

"Need any more service?"

"Not at present. If I want you again, I'll let you know."

"O.K., Mr. Perro. Just make out your check to the Croyden Detective Agency. That's me."

Pete Croyden, private investigator, third rate, hung up the phone and left the mid-town hotel.

CHAPTER 2

Neither Fame Nor Fortune

WHIZ WALTON was only four blocks from Tom Quest's hotel. He had been going into the Metropolitan Journal Building for a good many years, but this was the first time he had been invited to fill one of the overstuffed chairs in J. V. Langdon's luxurious office.

The white-haired managing editor had welcomed Whiz with a slap on the back and had called him "son." Such treatment made the columnist wary. He sprawled low with one thin leg thrown over an arm of the chair. His eyes were heavy-lidded with suspicion as he listened to Langdon's enthusiastic outburst.

"In forty years of newspaper work, I've never seen a more sublime piece of reporting than you delivered from Texas." Langdon slapped his desk. "It was terrific! An attempted jail break, the whole Carmody gang indicted

for murder, $100,000 in stolen cash recovered, a ghost town, an underground tunnel, mysterious sounds in the night, and on top of everything else, John Hanford exposed as a scheming crook. Whiz, it was terrific! There wasn't another newspaperman within a hundred miles. Your eyewitness account made newspaper history."

"You blue-penciled some of my story," Whiz said succinctly.

The editor took off his heavy-rimmed glasses and a knowing grin spread over his florid face. "I had a hunch you were up to something when you asked for a leave of absence. Tell me one thing, Whiz. Where did you get the tip on that story?"

"There wasn't any tip."

"Don't tell me you went all the way to Texas for nothing."

"I went all the way to Texas because I wanted to get away from New York and night clubs and telephones. That story exploded right under my nose so I put it on the wire, but so far as you and the *Metropolitan Journal* are concerned, I'm still on vacation. What's more, J. V., I'm going to stay that way. I like it."

Langdon grinned. "O.K., son, you want a raise. How much?"

Whiz shook his head slowly. "I'm not fooling, chief," he said. "I'm not playing hard-to-get."

The editor smiled mysteriously as he opened the middle drawer of his desk and drew out a sheaf of printed forms.

"Maybe these will change your mind," he said. "I got busy when your story broke. We offered your column

for syndication. These are contracts with over one hundred newspapers. From now on, my boy, you'll have national coverage. How do you like that?"

Whiz Walton shook his head again.

The editor looked incredulous. "Don't shake your head," he said impatiently. "You can't shake off a proposition like this. I'm going to make you a national institution. I'll make your name a household word. Do you realize what these contracts will mean to you? Every newspaperman in New York would jump at this chance."

"I wouldn't," replied Whiz Walton blandly.

"You'll be rich and famous—"

"It's no go, J. V. Nothing you can offer will change my mind. I'll be back in a year or so and if you still want my column I'll go to work."

"You're turning down the opportunity of a lifetime."

"That, J. V., is the truest thing you ever said."

"Huh?"

"I'm turning it down."

"But you can't do it. You can't do this to me. What about all these contracts?"

"What about them?"

"Yes. What will I do about them if you don't get back in harness?"

"I'll show you." The reporter wore a mischievous grin as he crossed the office and took the signed agreements from the editor's hand. He tore them through the center, dropped them in the wastebasket and resumed his seat.

"That," he said, "takes care of your contracts. I'm going to South America."

Langdon's face turned red. He looked almost apoplectic. His mouth was open but he couldn't speak. His blue eyes moved to the reporter, who leaned back blowing smoke rings toward the ceiling, then back to the wastebasket. He couldn't believe it. This hadn't happened.

"Y-you—" he sputtered.

"Go ahead," Whiz said tolerently, "blow off steam and when your blood pressure's back to normal, I'll tell you something about that trip to Texas. Something I didn't include in my story."

Langdon closed his mouth and rose from his swivel chair. He moved to the window, where he stood for several minutes, hands deep in trouser pockets, looking at the Broadway traffic three stories below. Then he strode to a side table and filled a glass with water from a thermos jug. He drank it and slapped down the glass with an exasperated snort.

"In forty years," he grumbled, "I've seen exactly ten men that I considered top-notch journalists. I've bought nine of them. But you," he barked, stabbing a finger toward Whiz Walton, "you want to go to South America!"

He stuck a cigar between his teeth at a belligerent angle and crossed to the window in another wall of the corner office.

Whiz finished his cigarette and flicked it toward a cuspidor. "Bull's-eye," he murmured.

Langdon pivoted away from the window on the cross-town street. "What'd you say?" he demanded.

Whiz pointed toward the heavy brass container. "Cig-

arette," he said. "I flicked it all the way from here. It's a five-yard shot."

The managing editor took a deep breath and dropped into his desk chair. His voice was more controlled.

"What about South America?" he asked.

"As I told you when I left here, J. V., I intended to visit a friend of mine in New Mexico, but I didn't get that far. After I got on the train at Lubbock, Texas, I became acquainted with a young fellow named Tom Quest."

"That's the fellow that was featured in your story from Texas. I know all about Tom Quest."

"Yes, I know you do. Tom's father was Hamilton Quest—"

"Save time, Walton. I read what you wrote. I even dug out our old stories about the time Hamilton Quest went into Peru with that expedition ten years ago. He's the scientist who made a specialty of the theories of Archimedes."

"Well, here's what you didn't know," said Whiz Walton. "John Hanford, the engineer who went to jail with that Texas organization, was on Hamilton Quest's expedition. Not a single news story has connected John Hanford, the crook, with the John Hanford who accompanied Quest ten years ago. He was Quest's best friend."

The editor glowered. "He was? Why didn't you tie that into your story? That was a good point. Why did you leave it out?"

"Hold on a minute, chief. Hanford turned out to be a rat. When he got back from South America he was money hungry. When he found he couldn't wangle a

fortune out of his stepdaughter, he threw in with the Carmody gang. He had pretty ambitious plans. In exchange for helping Ace Carmody stage a jail break, he expected Carmody to hold Barbara Moore a prisoner."

"Hanford's stepdaughter?"

"Yes. Hanford hoped to get a fat ransom from the trustees of her estate. The guy wanted a lot of money to build an airport in South America."

"You still haven't answered my question, Whiz. Why didn't you mention the fact that Hanford had been on the Quest expedition?"

"I just told you! Because John Hanford was a crook. There was no reason to throw a bad light on the expedition."

"But if Hanford was the only survivor—"

"But he wasn't! One reason I left this part out of my story was because it isn't my story. It's Tom's story, and we've got to keep it that way until Tom is ready for us to tell it. Tom got Hanford to confess that Hamilton Quest still is alive down there in Peru."

"After ten years?"

The reporter nodded. "Hanford came out of the jungle after ten years."

"And now—"

"And now," said Whiz, "Tom is off hell-for-leather on a trail that's ten years old to find his dad."

"And you're going with him?"

Whiz Walton nodded. He left the overstuffed chair and became more serious and sober than the editor had ever seen him. He rested his weight on the edge of the massive desk.

"This may sound funny coming from a guy like me," he said, "but something about Tom Quest got under my hide. That boy is sincere and genuine. He wants me to go with him and I'm going."

"And to do it," grumbled J. V. Langdon, "you're turning down the sweetest proposition in the world. Fame—money—"

"Chief, I learned a few things in Texas—things about friendship."

The editor nodded. He looked thoughtfully through the windows at Manhattan's towering buildings. "Not many people in this town," he mused, "would put friendship ahead of the things I've offered you."

He turned and faced Whiz Walton squarely. "Did you," he asked, "learn that from Tom Quest?"

The reporter nodded his head and smiled.

Langdon said, "I'd like to know that boy."

CHAPTER 3

Bedlam Off Broadway

THE MANAGING EDITOR looked at the lean reporter appraisingly for several minutes. "You came to work for this newspaper fifteen years ago," he said. "I've watched you grow from a cub reporter to an ace newshound. I've watched your column grow until it's one of the most successful features in our paper. During that time, Whiz," he went on, "I've watched you grow more and more cynical. I thought you were losing all feeling of consideration for other people.

"As editor of this newspaper, it was my duty to keep you on the job if possible. I've done my best. Frankly, I'm glad you turned my offer down. I'm glad for your sake. I'm glad to know that there are a few people who put friendship ahead of money."

The editor extended his hand. "When you get back

from South America, your job will be waiting for you."

Whiz Walton grinned and said, "Thanks, chief. You've been a swell guy to work for."

The two shook hands, then Whiz said, "I still think you cut out some of the best parts of the story I sent from Texas."

"But all I did was to modify what you said about Gulliver."

"That's what I mean."

"It was too incredible, Whiz. You must have been having nightmares when you wrote about him."

"Incredible, my eye!" retorted the columnist. "You should see Gulliver. Honest to gosh, chief, you'd go limp. He's head and shoulders taller than I am and built like a block of granite."

"I suppose, to use an old expression, he's as 'strong as an ox.' "

"That," said Whiz, "is a simple statement of fact. Gulliver wrestles with oxen and generally wins. One day in a rodeo he had his face massaged by an angry steer. His nose was laid over one cheek and his mouth looked like ripples in muddy water. They sewed up his face with forty-nine stitches. An ordinary man would have been laid up for weeks."

"And how long was Gulliver out of commission?"

Whiz laughed scornfully, "When the doctors finished their needlework, Gulliver found a horse and went after the steer. He bulldogged it so hard he broke its neck."

"That may be true, but some of your story was libelous! That expression, for instance, 'a face like a gorrilla that's tangled with a meat grinder,' or 'a voice like a buzz saw

operating on a railroad spike.' And that business of following a beeline wherever he goes."

"That stuff was all true," argued Whiz Walton. "Gulliver goes on the theory that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. If he can save two miles by driving over broken fields all day instead of following a road, he'll take the broken fields. If he wants to see something in front of his jeep, he'll climb over the dashboard and the radiator. It would be two steps *farther* to use the door."

"There!" exclaimed the editor. "That's what you wrote. *That's* one of the things I cut out of your story. When I read that I knew you were exaggerating. He couldn't step over the dashboard of his jeep because of the windshield."

Whiz smiled tolerently. "Maybe I forgot to explain," he said. "Gulliver has no windshield. It got in his way when he took pot shots at jack rabbits."

Neither Whiz nor Langdon had noticed that the traffic noises were increasing. But now the bedlam could no longer be ignored. Horns of every type blended into one awful cacophony that discounted the deadening qualities of the editor's soundproof office. Jangling waves of nerve-racking noise assailed the double windows and went on through. There was also a counterwave of human voices shouting in anger.

Whiz Walton stepped to the window with Langdon at his side.

"Traffic jam," he observed.

That observation was a masterpiece of understatement.

It was more than a "jam." Traffic on Broadway both north and south of the cross street was frozen as far as one could see.

When Whiz opened the window, the din was deafening. People with cars kept their horns going in a steady blast. All along the street, office windows were going up and people were staring down to see what was causing all the uproar below.

Whiz had to shout to make himself heard. He pointed to the cross street. "There's the trouble," he cried.

Cars were stalled on the one-way street in a solid mass that made a barrier across Broadway.

Whiz crossed to the windows overlooking the side street, opened one and leaned out. "Holy mackerel," he howled. "Look at that mess!"

Cars, cabs and trucks were packed four abreast. A man could have walked to any part of the block by using the tops of those machines as steppingstones. Near the end of the block, the jam ended abruptly. Beyond that point, the street was empty.

The keystone of the mass appeared to be a jeep that stood facing the wrong way on a one-way street. It was parked far from the curb next to a horse that lay on its side in front of a huckster's vegetable wagon. The jeep stood, a law unto itself, impudently facing the other vehicles. A man squatted next to the fallen horse and fumbled in a large chest.

He was a big man, wearing a battered black felt hat. While Whiz and Langdon watched, he selected a jar from the chest and held it up for scrutiny. The horse

raised its head and started to rise, but the big man placed one hand on the fallen creature's neck and pushed the head back to the pavement.

The bony old horse lay there quietly. The good Samaritan took a gob of the jar's contents on the end of one finger and smeared it over a cut on the horse's knee.

The bony old horse lay quietly no longer. It went into action like a tightly wound clock spring suddenly released. Its head shot up; its feet shot out. The animal seemed to bounce off the pavement. It regained its feet, reared high and then took off with a whinny that shrilled above all other sounds.

The horse dodged to the side and took the only opening it saw. The wagon bounced on the curb, careened in a sharp turn on the sidewalk and went through a plate-glass window.

At that point an office boy burst into Langdon's office. "Look out there, boss!" he yelled.

"What's it all about?"

"Joe Cartozzi's horse fell down and cut a knee. Before Joe could do anything a crazy cowboy in a jeep came up the street the wrong way. He stopped and got out to see about the horse. He's got traffic in a bigger snarl than V-J Day!"

Langdon looked out the window again. The scene had changed. The big man had become the center of a crowd of wildly shouting, arm-waving, outraged citizens. Joe, who owned the horse, was shouting in Italian. The owner of the restaurant shouted in Greek while he pointed to his broken window. Four policemen had leaped out of a squad car. One of these expressed him-

self in the style of the Irish. A quiet-looking man stood on the fringe of the inner circle beside a small car with the emblem of the S.P.C.A. painted on the door. The huckster's wagon remained half in, half out of the broken window, but the horse had gone, with broken traces trailing. Those nearest the capsized wagon were ankle deep in vegetables.

"That guy with the jeep," observed Langdon, "needs a little help."

"He needs a little help," replied Whiz, "like Death Valley needs a little rain! Give me a voucher so I can get some money from the cashier. I'll have to spend plenty to straighten this out!"

"Why should you straighten it out?" demanded the editor.

Whiz grinned. "Because that big guy is the one I told you about! Gulliver has come to town!"

CHAPTER 4

Death Warning

WHIZ WALTON didn't wait for the elevator. He shot down the stairs of the newspaper building to the cashier's window near the door.

"Cash this quick!" he said, handing in a voucher signed by Langdon.

He grabbed the money without bothering to count it and streaked through the door.

It took a lot of elbowing and shoving to work his way through the mass of cars and people, but finally he reached Gulliver.

Gulliver was trying to talk to a dozen people at the same time. When he saw Whiz Walton, he let out a whoop that would have frightened a banshee and threw out both arms.

"Yo'! Whiz Walton!" he howled. "Come here an' talk to these frothed-up critters. I ain't gettin' no farther than I could throw a posthole."

Whiz couldn't speak Italian, Greek or any other foreign language, but he quickly made himself understood by the Greek restaurant owner, the Italian huckster and an assortment of taxicab drivers by waving money under their noses.

He gave the restaurant owner and the huckster enough to more than cover the damage. He made a contribution to the S.P.C.A. and passed out bills to cab drivers to make generous amends for the time they had lost. And all the while, he kept telling Gulliver to ignore the sharp remarks that came from all sides.

Several policemen were on hand. They knew and liked Whiz Walton and were on Gulliver's side as soon as they saw that the big fellow was a friend of the energetic reporter. They cleared the way so he could turn his jeep and run it close to the curb. Then they went to work with waving arms and soon had traffic flowing smoothly.

By this time, Whiz Walton had disposed of all complainants and nearly all of the money. He looked ruefully at the remaining bills, then handed them to Sergeant Doyle, who stood beside the jeep.

"Split it up," he said.

Doyle's broad face expanded into a grin. "If this guy," he said with a slight brogue and a nod toward Gulliver, "is a friend of yours, sure and you'd better put a chain on him."

Gulliver was slumped low in the seat, his huge arms folded across his chest and a sulky look on his face.

He turned toward Whiz. "Doggone," he grumbled. "What's got everyone in such a sod-pawin', horn-tossin'

mood? Some o' them hombres was howlin' in a way that'd drive a wolf to suicide. Why'd they all have their bristles up?"

Whiz replied with his voice under fine control. "Maybe you didn't notice, Gulliver," he said, "but you and the jeep and the medicine chest and the horse had the road cut off."

"What of it?" Gulliver demanded innocently. "That horse fell down an' cut his knee. I had some stuff in my medicine chest to fix him up, so I just stopped, that's all. That's nothin' for anyone to get frothy about. Where's all these people goin' that they got to be in such a hurry?"

"That," replied Whiz, "is one of New York's greatest mysteries."

Then the reporter tried to explain the intricacies of Manhattan's one-way streets.

"I tried to tell him," said the policeman who had been stationed at the corner. "I blew my whistle at him and pointed to the sign when he turned into this street." To Gulliver he said, "Didn't you see me?"

"Sure I seen yo'," Gulliver grumbled. "But I just got blamed fed up with side-windin' all over this here place tryin' to git to where I want to git. The trouble is those doggoned taxi drivers are as touchy as a teased snake."

Two dirty-faced boys in ragged clothes approached the jeep and announced that they had caught the runaway horse and restored it to the owner.

"Good work." Whiz Walton grinned and reached into his pocket. "Let me see what I can find for you." The reporter looked at a handful of change. He put it

back in his pocket and turned to Sergeant Doyle. "Let me take ten bucks," he said. "I'll send it over to the station for you."

The policeman handed over two fives, and Whiz gave one to each of the boys.

Gulliver eyed the transaction. His face, tanned to the color of old saddle leather, took on an inspired expression. "Wait a second," he said in a voice that made the urchins stare. "I got somethin' here in my jeep for these dogies."

He pawed around the floor behind his seat and brought forth a large paper sack.

"Fluff-duffs," he explained, holding up a doughnut that was dwarfed by his huge hand. "I stopped along the road this morning an' bought six dozen o' them to sort o' munch on. I got all these left over. I don't like this fancy fodder. It's got no authority." He handed the sack to the nearest boy and said, "Whack these up an' bog 'em down."

When Whiz Walton assured the police that for the best interests of Manhattan's traffic situation he would take Gulliver under his personal guidance, Doyle said, "Take him away."

The reporter motioned Gulliver to the other seat and took the wheel himself. When he stepped on the starter, the motor roared like an airplane. For some obscure reason, Gulliver had removed the muffler, but this was a triviality. Whiz put the car in gear and headed for the mid-town hotel where Tom Quest had registered.

Gulliver's admiration for Whiz Walton increased immeasurably when he saw the ease with which the metro-

politan reporter guided the jeep through the streets and into the garage beneath the hotel.

Whiz gave instructions for the storage of the car, then pointed to suitcases and other luggage including Gulliver's precious medicine chest.

"Those things," he said, "are to be sent to the airport."

"Like fun they are," rumbled Gulliver emphatically.

"What's the matter?" demanded Whiz. "I thought you wanted to take all of those with you."

"Yo're doggoned right I do. That's why I don't aim to take no chances on some o' these sidewinders makin' off with 'em. I ain't goin' to let 'em out o' my sight." He turned to the attendant. "Yo'," he said, "send that stuff right up to the bedroom that's been set aside for me. I'm keepin' it with me."

"But it's got to be taken to the airport," argued Whiz.

"It'll git there. I'll see to that."

The reporter shrugged his shoulders helplessly and told the grinning garage man to do as Gulliver said.

When the big man registered at the desk, the expression on the clerk's face was something to behold. Torn between his admiration for the famous columnist and his awe for Gulliver, he swung his eyes back and forth like a spectator at a fast tennis match.

It was a gay reunion in Tom Quest's bedroom.

Tom laughed until his sides ached when Whiz told about Gulliver's adventure with the fallen horse. Then the columnist ordered dinner served in the room.

While the trio ate, Whiz reported that a plane had been chartered for the trip to Guayaquil, Ecuador, from

which city they were to set out for the Peruvian jungle to the east.

It was a twin-engined amphibian capable of carrying nine passengers. There would be ample room for all the luggage that would be needed and room to spare. The pilot and copilot were competent men who knew the route.

Tom Quest pushed the dishes to one side of the table and spread out a map. His eyes sparkled with anticipation.

"Here," said Whiz, drawing a notebook from his vest pocket, "is the route the pilots outlined, also a time schedule. We'll make our first landing at Miami. That'll take about six hours from the time we leave here. From Miami, it's a seven-and-a-half or eight hour hop to Balboa, in the Canal Zone. From there, it's a little over four hours to Guayaquil. They could probably clip the time, but there's no need to try for speed. We can lay over at either one of those two stops if we want to."

While the reporter spoke, Tom plotted the route on his map. When he finished, he looked at Gulliver and saw a glum expression on the big fellow's face.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I don't like it."

"You don't like what?" asked Whiz Walton.

"The way them two pilots are goin' to shilly-shally with stops at Miami an' Balboa." Gulliver leaned forward. "Let me take that pencil, Tom. I'll show yo' something." He drew a straight line from New York City to Guayaquil, Ecuador. "There," he said proudly. "There's

the way they ought to go. In a beeline, like the crow flies."

Tom's marking deviated but little from Gulliver's straight line. Even this was more than Gulliver would tolerate. "Yo' tell them pilots," the big man went on, speaking to Whiz Walton, "to never mind about Miami an' Balboa. If we're goin' to Guayaquil, let's go to *Guayaquil.*"

Whiz laughed. "Don't take it so hard, Gulliver. We've got to make a couple of stops for fuel."

Gulliver snorted. "Humph! Can't they do like I do in my jeep an' carry some extra fuel in tin cans?"

Whiz hoped to avoid a discussion of the problems of carrying hundreds of gallons of gasoline in five-gallon cans and refueling the plane in flight.

He changed the subject. "There are," he said, "just two things we've got to settle now. What time do we want to start and what about food? If we start about noon tomorrow we'll be in Guayaquil at about seven o'clock the next morning."

"That suits me. How about you, Gulliver?" asked Tom.

"I got to have about two or three hours to do some shoppin', but I reckon I can be ready to git gittin' around noon."

"What shopping do you have to do?" demanded Whiz.

"Aw-w, just some stuff I got to git. Let's fix it to start at noon. Now, as to the food—"

Whiz again consulted his notebook. "We can eat at

the refueling points or we can take some sandwiches along with us."

"Sandwiches!" said Gulliver disdainfully. "Not on yo' life! Yo' just leave the food up to me. I'll see that we eat. I'll—"

The sentence was interrupted by a rap on the door.

"I'll see who it is," said Tom, jumping up.

The man at the door was a stranger. He spoke in a low voice with a slight trace of a foreign accent.

"Are you Tom Quest?" he asked.

Tom said, "Yes."

"Then you'd better let me in. I have something to tell you."

Whiz Walton came to the door and said, "What's the gag?"

"I assure you it is no—er—gag. In fact, my friend, I have a rather grim message for Tom Quest."

Tom said, "What is it?"

"Someone is trying to kill you!"

CHAPTER 5

Designed for Murder

THE STRANGER standing in the open door couldn't have weighed more than one hundred pounds. He had the dark skin of a Latin and bowed in the Continental manner as he handed Tom a neatly engraved card bearing the name Alonzo Perro.

Tom read the name aloud but before he could introduce his friends, Gulliver stepped up and took charge.

"I," he barked, "am Gulliver. That there is Whiz Walton." With one hand he jerked the visitor into the room while, with the other, he slapped the door. It closed with a thud that shook the walls.

There was no pretense of gentleness when he searched Perro for weapons. He ran his hands around Perro's perfectly fitted dark-blue flannel coat and slapped the hip and side pockets of the gray-striped trousers. When he had finished the search, he placed the middle finger of his right hand in the center of Perro's flat chest and

shoved the astounded little man into the handiest chair. It all happened before Perro could do more than gasp.

Gulliver stood close like a mighty menace, wearing an expression that would have turned milk sour. His voice was heavy with throaty vibrations.

"Anyone," he rumbled, "who comes here makin' threats agin Tom Quest is goin' to deal with me. Now start talkin'."

Alonzo Perro's exceedingly dark eyes moved from Gulliver to Tom and then to Whiz Walton. Ordinarily composed, he had been badly shaken, literally and figuratively. He glanced at the fine Panama hat he had dropped near the door and the Malacca walking stick near by.

From an inner pocket he drew a comb which he ran through his gleaming jet-black hair. He stroked both sides of his waxed mustache, then adjusted the pearl stickpin in his fine silk necktie.

Gulliver meanwhile sniffed the air. "Perfume!" he snorted disgustedly.

Tom said, "Please take it easy, Gulliver. Mr. Perro didn't threaten me."

Alonzo Perro looked grateful.

"I—I came here as a friend," he began, "—a friendly gesture." He straightened in the chair, smoothed his rumpled coat and flicked an imaginary speck of dust from his sharply creased trousers. He looked at Gulliver and said, "If you'll permit me to explain—"

"*Permit* yo'," rasped Gulliver. "Stranger, yo'd better start explainin' mighty quick or what I'll do to yo' will be as unexpected as the fifth ace in a poker deck!"

Alonzo Perro began by producing letters and docu-

ments that established him as a citizen of Ecuador. He explained that he had been born and educated in Europe, had learned to speak several different languages and had traveled extensively. He had gone to Ecuador as the sole heir of a distant relative to take possession of a small cinchona plantation high in the Andes. The plantation had proved unprofitable, but liking the country he had settled in Guayaquil. His work for years had been of a diplomatic nature. According to the documents, he was a man of influence and prestige.

After identifying himself, he said, "I want to get home as quickly as possible. Transportation is difficult. The airlines are booked for many days ahead."

"But I don't understand," said Tom Quest, "what this has to do with me."

Perro smiled, showing perfect white teeth. "I am about to explain that. When I left the office of Panagra Airlines yesterday, I was followed."

"How do you know?" demanded Whiz Walton.

"In my work, I have learned to observe things. A heavily built man kept watching me while I was in the Panagra office. When I left, he came after me. I confirmed the suspicion that I was being followed by having the driver of my taxicab make many turns. The stranger stayed behind me until I reached my apartment. He stared at me as his cab went past. I wondered about him for a time, then I dismissed the matter from my mind.

"Last night I wakened. In the open window I could see two men. They were entering my bedroom by means of a fire escape. One of those men was large with broad

shoulders. I could not see him clearly in the dim light, but I am sure he was the one who had followed me. I closed my eyes, making believe I was asleep, because I did not wish to risk my life for the small amount of money that was in the room. I soon learned that these men were not after money. I heard one of them say 'We'd better make sure he's Tom Quest. We don't want to kill the wrong person.' At that, I opened my eyes. A flashlight was turned on my face. The second voice said 'You fool! This is not Tom Quest!'

"I was told to make no outcry if I wished to stay alive. For a few moments the men argued with each other. Then, while one of them guarded me, the other went through my papers and discovered my identity. They decided that a great mistake had been made. They had mistaken me for you." Perro nodded to Tom.

"I don't see how anyone could make a mistake like that," observed Whiz. "You don't look anything like Tom."

"I do not pretend to understand it," replied the Ecuadorian. "I am simply telling you what happened. Before the intruders left, they warned me. They said I would be killed if I dared breathe a word of what had happened."

"How did you know about me?" asked Tom.

"I made a few inquiries and I was referred to an article in the newspaper." Perro drew a clipping from his wallet. "This article," he said.

It was one of Whiz Walton's stories dealing with the capture of the Carmody gang. It was a follow-up on earlier stories.

"I read this," Perro said, "and then made further in-

quiries at several newspaper offices. I learned quite a bit about Tom Quest, much of it unpublished."

"All that attention is pretty flattering," observed Whiz Walton.

"I wanted to find the young man," replied Perro, "so I could warn him of the danger."

"Golly," Tom said, "I don't know who could want to kill me. Do you?" he asked, turning to Gulliver.

The big man raked his chin with the huge thumbnail on his right hand. "Doggone," he muttered, "I don't get it." To Perro he said, "I'm sure sorry I roughed yo' up. It was downright nice of yo' to come an' tell us about last night."

"How did you find out where I was staying?" asked Tom.

"I was quite sure these murderers would watch me, so I hired a detective for that purpose. He soon learned that a reservation had been made for you at this hotel. He watched, and reported to me when you arrived."

Tom said, "Whoever these men were, they could have found me in the same way."

"We're thinking the same way, Tom," said Whiz Walton. "It seems to me, Perro, you went far out of your way to warn us."

The man from South America smiled and nodded. "That," he said, "is true. I waited until it was dark, then left my apartment by a rear door. I entered this hotel by a service entrance and walked up the stairs. I was afraid to appear in the lobby."

"You could have told me all this by telephone," said Tom.

"That would not have served my purpose. You see, I had a selfish motive in coming to warn you."

"You did?"

"Yes. I told you it was difficult to get a reservation for my return trip. I am extremely anxious to get home. I came here in person to seek a favor in return for what I have told you."

"A favor?"

"You are leaving for Guayaquil sometime tomorrow."

"We're gittin' goin' at noon," put in Gulliver.

"May I go with you?"

Whiz Walton said, "Your story sounds a little thin, Perro. In the first place, I don't know why anyone would want to hurt Tom Quest. In the second place, I don't see how anyone could mistake you for Tom Quest. And in the third place, your embassy would see to it that you got a plane even if someone else got bumped to make room for you. Are you sure you didn't make up that story so you could get a ride in our plane?"

Perro shrugged his shoulders and threw out his hands. "You do not believe me," he said. "I cannot blame you. The truth is always more incredible than an untruth that is designed for a specific purpose. I cannot prove what I have told you."

He rose and picked up his hat and stick. "I am sorry to have taken up your time," he apologized. "You do not believe me—but be on your guard. Someone wants to kill Tom Quest."

He moved to the door and turned the handle. As if the turning knob were a signal, someone rapped. Perro opened the door. A bellboy stood in the corridor.

"A package for Tom Quest," the bellboy said, holding out a paper-wrapped parcel about six inches square and three inches deep.

Perro accepted the package and closed the door. He half extended it toward Tom and then a strange look crossed his face.

"A moment!" he muttered. He held the package to his ear, then acted with the speed of a jack rabbit. Muttering a Spanish expletive, he dashed into the bathroom, turned on both bathtub faucets full force and held the package in the stream.

Tom joined him. "What in the world—" he began.

"Stand back!" exclaimed Perro. "Stand back and let me handle this. I've had experience with bombs."

"Bombs!" gasped Tom.

"What are yo' talkin' about?" barked Gulliver, barging into the white-tiled room.

"I heard it ticking—"

Gulliver snatched the package and elbowed Perro to one side. "I'll blame soon find out about it," he roared. He tore away the wrapping. Then picked off the lid of a water-soaked cardboard candy box. He stared at what he saw.

Inside the box there were two flashlight batteries, a coil which was cunningly wired and a small alarm clock. This mechanism was connected by wires to a tin can the size of a sardine tin that probably held an explosive. It was a cleverly contrived device, arranged to explode when the alarm went off. The alarm was set for five minutes after ten o'clock. Tom looked at his own watch,

and a chill ran down his spine. That was too close for comfort!

"Permit me," said Perro, reaching for the box. "I have had experience in making these things harmless."

With a few deft twists he snapped the wires and removed the batteries, explaining as he did so, "There are some radical people in South America. It is not uncommon for men in high positions to receive things of this sort. You are very lucky you did not fire the bomb when you removed the cover from the box."

With a well-manicured finger he indicated a lever which had been connected by a string to the cover. "This," he explained, "was supposed to fire the bomb when the package was opened. The clock would have caused detonation if the package had been set aside, unopened. You are alive at this moment because the maker of this thing was unskilled."

Gulliver's big hands were made into fists. "If I ever git my hands on the critter that sent this," he muttered, "I'll take him apart a little piece at a time."

Tom Quest couldn't believe it. "Who in the world would send a thing like that?" he said.

"I dunno, but I sure aim to find out," Gulliver said.

In the meantime, Whiz Walton had fished the soaked wrapping paper from the bottom of the bathtub and spread it out. "We can probably get a line on the sender by this wrapping," he said. "The police can learn a lot from it."

Gulliver said, "I'll git ahold o' the bellboy that brought it here an' make him tell where *he* got it. I—" He broke

off suddenly as his eyes fell on the printed letters in the address. He snatched the paper from Whiz Walton's hand. "Lemme see that."

"There's nothing on it but Tom's name and the number of this room," said Whiz.

Gulliver's voice was barely audible. "Great day!" he muttered. "Doggone, this here beats me!" He waggled a finger at the printing. "I'd know that letterin' anywhere," he said. "Tom's name was put on that package by John Hanford!"

"But it can't be John Hanford," said Tom. "He's in jail."

"I don't give three hoots where he is," retorted Gulliver. "This here letterin' is his! I'll show yo'!"

The big man went to his own bedroom and returned a moment later unfolding a map. "This here," he said, "is a map o' part o' the jungle country in Peru. It was made by John Hanford when we were on that expedition ten years ago. It's got some o' his hand letterin' on it." He rested his foot on the edge of the bathtub and spread the map out on his knee. "Now yo' just compare the letterin' on this map to the letterin' on that hunk o' wrappin' paper."

There was no question about it. The square, precise lettering was almost identical.

While Whiz Walton studied both samples of lettering, he muttered, "If it hadn't been for Tom, John Hanford wouldn't be in jail. Hanford's the one man in the world with a grudge against Tom."

"Now what have yo' got to say?" asked Gulliver triumphantly.

"Just give me a few minutes at the telephone," replied the newshound.

He went into Gulliver's bedroom and closed the door. He was alone for the next ten minutes. Then he came through the connecting door to Tom's room and faced Tom, Gulliver and Alonzo Perro.

"Well," he said, "I had to pull some strings to get the information. The authorities don't want it made public just yet."

"They don't want *what* made public?" asked Tom.

"Hold on there, Whiz," interrupted Gulliver. "Lemme stick Mr. Perro in the bathroom where he can't hear yo'. He's the only public in this room, an' I believe in bein' on the safe side."

Gulliver picked the little man up, deposited him in the bathroom and slammed the door. "Now," he drawled, "what was that yo' was sayin', Whiz?"

"John Hanford escaped from prison two days ago!"

CHAPTER 6

Pride and Prejudice

WHIZ WALTON had been given the details of John Hanford's escape from prison only after he had promised not to release the information to the newspapers.

The prison authorities had made use of Hanford's specialized training and his extensive background as an engineer by putting him to work on the construction of a new road near the prison. Hanford had been using a surveyor's transit when he made the break for freedom. He had been sighting through the instrument several hundred feet away from the nearest armed guard. Suddenly he had bolted across a field toward a county road. The guard had shouted a warning which Hanford had ignored. The guard fired a warning shot over the head of the escaping man. When this, too, had been ignored, the guard aimed and fired again. Hanford had fallen in the tall grass but he had regained his feet and kept on running. As he reached the road a car appeared

from behind a screen of trees. Hanford leaped aboard and got away.

"That settles it, then," decided Gulliver when Whiz Walton had finished his description of the escape. "That ornery, triple-twisted sidewinder came here to New York to git even with Tom."

"But what about you, Gulliver?" demanded Whiz. "You had as much to do with Hanford's capture as Tom did."

"The bomb," said Tom, "probably would have killed all of us."

The reporter nodded and said, "Maybe you're right. I suppose," he went on, "we should turn the infernal machine over to the police and tell them what we know about Hanford."

"I hate like thunder to do that," put in Gulliver. "Doggone, if I had my way, I wouldn't call in no lawmen on this deal. I'd go huntin' for Hanford myself. The only trouble is, it'd probably hold us back from startin' for South America." He scratched his chin thoughtfully with his thumbnail. "There's a lot I don't savvy," he complained. "If Hanford wanted to git us with that bomb, why did he send them gunslingers to the half-pint's apartment?"

"Where?" Whiz asked.

Gulliver motioned toward the bathroom. "The half-pint there. Mr. Faro."

Just then the bathroom door opened and a voice said, "The name, Mr. Gulliver, is Perro."

Tom Quest had been quiet and thoughtful during the conversation. Noticing the faraway expression in

Tom's eyes, Whiz Walton said, "What are you thinking about, Tom?"

Tom's father had been a master of applied logic and Tom had studied his notebooks diligently. The father had written, "If you want to know where the dog buried the bone, look at it from the dog's point of view and imagine you have a bone. What would you do with it?"

Tom had practiced that kind of reasoning and had learned that it was, at times, surprisingly successful. He had acquired the knack of putting himself in the place of another person and studying the situation from that person's point of view.

"I've been thinking about the bomb," he said, turning to Perro. "You told us, Mr. Perro, that you had had quite a bit of experience in handling bombs."

"That is right, my friend, and the bomb that came here was not expertly made. Properly assembled it would have exploded when the lid of the box was removed."

Perro had been holding his fine Panama hat in his lap. Now he handed it to Gulliver and moved to the table on which the parts of the bomb had been spread out.

"I could easily show you where this man you call Hanford made his mistake." He pointed to the mousetrap-like device to which a string was fastened. "This string," he said, "was fastened to the cover of the box to explode the bomb when the cover was removed. Had it been securely fastened we would probably have been killed despite the fact that the bomb was wet. But it was not securely fastened. The string was held to the cover by a piece of gummed paper which came off when it was wet."

Perro gestured with his hands. "Does that," he smiled, "account for the failure of the bomb?"

"I guess so," Tom said, "but that's not what I was thinking about."

"What were you thinking about?" asked Whiz Walton.

Tom said, "Well, if I'd been John Hanford and I had rigged up that bomb so it would explode when the cover was taken off the box I'd have let it go at that. I don't see why he went to all the trouble of fixing a second firing device with the alarm clock."

"Ah, but that, my friend, is a simple thing to understand," said Perro. " He could not be sure that you would open the package as soon as you received it."

Tom grinned. "I wouldn't be likely to leave a box like that wrapped up. I'd be too anxious to see what was in it, and anyway, what difference did it make when I opened it?"

Perro shrugged his shoulders and smiled pleasantly. "Perhaps I do not understand this—this logic of yours," he said.

"It was the clock," Tom went on, "that gave the thing away. If you hadn't heard that, Mr. Perro, we'd have all been blown to kingdom come."

The dark-skinned man suddenly exclaimed, "Santa Maria!" and made a leap to snatch his hat from Gulliver. "What are you trying to do?" he exclaimed.

Gulliver's eyes went wide with innocent surprise. "What's the matter with yo', Cairo?"

"My hat!" sputtered the South American. "Y-you crush it!"

"I wasn't doin' nothin' to hurt it. That's a genuine Panama, ain't it?"

"It is," said Perro proudly as he smoothed the brim of his soft headpiece.

Gulliver continued, "I've heard that them there hats are so fine an' soft that they can be pulled through a finger ring."

He held up a ring of tremendous size.

It was a heavy gold ring upon which was mounted a curious figure. A small diamond was surrounded by a spiral of gold ribbon. At the outside edge of the spiral, the ribbon made a single curve in the opposite direction to surround a second diamond.

The figure on the ring had once been an earring designed by Hamilton Quest for Tom's mother. Tom wore the other earring on his own ring.

The earrings resembled a question mark, but Tom's father hadn't been thinking of that when he had designed them. He had been thinking of Archimedes, whom he considered one of the greatest of all scientists. Hamilton Quest had written voluminously about the Greek mathematician and had duplicated his studies of the spiral.

But Alonzo Perro wasn't interested in spirals or diamonds or the ring itself. He caressed his Panama as if it were a helpless puppy that had been lashed by a cruel master.

"If you wish to draw a hat through your ring," he said angrily, "please experiment with a hat of your own."

He put on his hat.

"Furthermore," he continued, "my name is not Cairo.

It is Perro. I wish you would get it right. It begins with the letter 'P.' "

Gulliver nodded soberly. " 'P,' " he murmured. "I'll sure try to remember that. 'P' like in prune."

The small man drew himself up stiffly. He clicked his heels and stood at attention.

"I did not come here," he said, "to be insulted! I came here on a mission of good will. I came to warn you —to save the life of this young man. First I am thrown about and slapped, then I am placed in the bathroom, then I am called a liar—"

"Aw-w," broke in Gulliver, "no such thing—"

"Silence! I am speaking. At the risk of my life, I came here to warn you of a plot and to ask a simple favor, but you do not believe me. You reject my request. Then a bomb is delivered. Who knows it is a bomb? I do. Again I risk my life to save you. And then I am insulted. My fine hat is treated as a—a rag, and I am called a—a prune."

"I didn't call yo' no prune," said Gulliver. "All I said was—"

"Just a minute, " broke in Tom Quest. "Please don't get us wrong, Mr. Perro. You've got to admit that your story sounded a little bit farfetched, but I guess there's nothing farfetched about the bomb. You did save our lives and I want you to know that I appreciate it."

Perro pointed toward Gulliver. "That—that man—" he said.

Tom grinned and said, "Gulliver was just having fun with you. I'm sorry you were offended. Will you shake hands?"

The man from Ecuador accepted Tom's hand and bowed from the hips. "I accept your apology," he said.

"Great!"

"Now," said Gulliver, "sit yo'self down an' cool off. I—I got some gumdrops in my bag. I'll go git 'em."

"Thank you, but I must go," replied Perro. "It is already quite late and I must find a place in which to hide." He assumed the expression of a martyr. "Your enemies have become *my* enemies," he said dramatically. "The murderers who were sent by the man you call John Hanford will surely know that I came here to warn you. I am a marked man."

He looked at the floor and sighed heavily. "It is hard," he said, "to die when one has so much to live for."

Whiz Walton looked at Gulliver. Perro's act seemed to have made a deep impression. The big man appeared to be on the verge of tears. He looked at Tom Quest and said, "Looka here, Tom, maybe we were a little rough on 'Lonzo here. I don't see no reason why we can't tote him along with us to Guayaquil."

"Of course we can," agreed Tom heartily. "How about it, Mr. Perro? You can spend the night here with us and we'll send for your things in the morning."

Perro's face lit up. His eyes brimmed with gratitude and his expressions of thanks were profuse—almost too profuse. He gripped Tom's hand in both of his and then shook hands with Gulliver. He turned to Whiz, who looked up blandly from his chair.

"You, too," Perro said. "I must thank you for accepting me as a cotraveler."

"I didn't open my mouth," replied Whiz.

"But you do not object to me?"

The reporter shook his head and said, "It's Tom Quest's party. I'm just going along for the ride. Whatever Tom wants is O.K. with me."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Perro said. "But I want to feel that I am not unwelcome to you."

"Look, Perro, you've got what you came here for. Why don't you settle down and let it go at that? We have a lot of things to do."

Whiz Walton spent the next half hour talking to police officials on the telephone. He reported on the bomb, told what he knew about John Hanford and made an appointment with investigators who would come to the hotel as soon as possible to pick up the parts of the bomb, the box that had held it, and the paper wrapping bearing Tom Quest's name.

Under ordinary conditions, the departure would have been delayed while Tom Quest and the others were held as material witnesses. It was this that Whiz Walton sought to avoid and it took a lot of arguing with his friends in police headquarters.

When he hung up the phone for the last time he let out a sigh and mopped his perspiring brow. He looked tired, but he wore a grin.

"Some of the boys will be here in a few minutes," he announced, "and get statements from us. Then they'll let us alone. Now, unless you've changed your mind, I'll call the pilot of our plane and tell him to be ready to go at noon tomorrow."

Tom Quest nodded and Gulliver said, "Yo' can call him, Whiz. Tell him that at noon tomorrow, we aim to git gittin' to Guayaquil."

CHAPTER 7

"Gittin' Gittin'"

DURING his career as a reporter, Whiz Walton had done countless favors for people in all walks of life. He had a host of friends and he didn't hesitate to call on them when he wanted a favor in return.

Now he called the manager of the hotel. This urbane gentleman was eager to please Whiz Walton. Despite crowded conditions, he found a way to make available a room where Alonzo Perro might spend the night.

Then Whiz called two members of the detective bureau. They came unofficially. The reporter gave them the key to the place where Perro had been staying and instructions to go there, pack his things and bring them to his new sleeping quarters near the adjoining rooms of Tom Quest and Gulliver. The same detectives were on hand the following morning to serve as an escort to the airport.

Tom Quest slept a little later than usual that morn-

ing. He was awakened by Whiz Walton, who explained that Gulliver had been gone for a couple of hours.

"We're to go to the airport with Perro. Gulliver will meet us there."

Tom nodded and said, "He had a lot of shopping to do."

"What in the world is he looking for?"

Tom grinned. "I don't know."

"He sent me a list of the things we'd need for the expedition." Whiz referred to a small, black, pocket notebook. "I bought everything he asked for."

He ran his eye down the list muttering, "Water canteens, tinned biscuits, canned corned beef, fish, baked beans, tomatoes. Emergency rations—forty-five cans, two dozen packages of dried figs, malted milk tablets, bouillon cubes, powdered milk, dried soup, dried eggs—" He turned a page.

"I don't think I missed a thing," he said. "Now let's see. Tent, waterproof matchboxes, rifles, ammunition, mosquito nets, sun helmets, needles, thread, first-aid equipment, flashlights, extra batteries and bulbs, maps—" He went on, noting that each item had been checked. Meanwhile, Tom showered, then rubbed his lean, well-tanned body to a healthy glow with a rough towel.

"I went over these lists with Gulliver last night," the reporter said. "I showed him what we had, and told him everything was on the plane. I asked him why he had to go shopping this morning."

"Did he tell you?" asked Tom, buttoning his shirt.

"No. He said not to worry about anything else. He'd take care of the rest of the things we needed."

"We'll probably find out what they are when he's good and ready to tell us and not before."

The ride to the airport was uneventful. Tom was delighted when he saw the trim amphibian that was to carry the party as far as Guayaquil. He liked the pilots, too. They were young, but they had a calm, settled look in their steady eyes that inspired confidence.

They showed Tom the forward cabin and explained the amazing assortment of instruments that reduced flying and navigation to little more than a system of buttons. The plane's main cabin was large and roomy. In the rear there was a little galley where meals could be prepared in flight, and back of this a door opened into the luggage compartment. Gulliver would bring his own luggage and his recent purchases, but everything else was neatly stowed away.

Alonzo Perro and Whiz Walton remained outside while Tom went through the plane. They were talking to four men who looked like interested spectators. Actually the men were there on duty. The reporter hadn't told Tom Quest that the plane had been under constant guard by undercover men since the threat against Tom became known.

Tom came out of the plane and looked at his wrist watch. "It's eleven-thirty," he announced.

"Gulliver should be here," said Whiz. "I hope he didn't get into an argument with the driver of his cab."

"He'll be here," replied Tom confidently. "He said we'd take off at noon. He'll see to it that we do."

"Tom, do you mind if I leave you here with Perro for a few minutes? I want to call headquarters and see what's

new. There should be a report on the bomb by this time."

"Go ahead, Whiz. We won't leave without you."

The reporter grinned and said, "You hadn't better."

The next twenty minutes seemed to drag interminably. Tom showed Alonzo Perro through the plane but the South American seemed little interested. Then the pilots closed themselves in the forward compartment and began the routine check. They started the motors, and revved them up. They checked various instruments, then let the motors idle. As the roar subsided, Tom Quest heard a bellow from outside the plane.

"Hey, yo', Tom Quest!"

"It's Gulliver," Tom told Perro. "Come on."

Gulliver was in the front seat of a taxicab. It was the only place he could possibly have ridden. The rear seat was piled to the ceiling with cardboard boxes, wooden crates and packages in wrapping paper.

"Give me a hand with this here stuff," he barked as he squirmed out of the cab. "We got to step lively to get away from here on schedule." He turned to the small man at the wheel. "That goes for yo', too, Charlie," he said as he opened the rear door. "Yo' get that trunk in back unlocked so's I can get the stuff out of it."

The driver of the cab looked as if the morning had been rugged. He moved with an air of resignation. He must have learned the hopelessness of arguing with Gulliver.

There was one brown cardboard carton that, according to the label, originally had held corn flakes. Gulliver's eyes fairly twinkled as he lifted this off the rear seat of the cab.

"She don't hold corn flakes now," he said mysteriously.

"What does it hold?" asked Tom.

Gulliver chuckled and acted very well pleased with himself.

"It's a sort o' surprise," he said. "I had no end o' trouble gittin' this stuff from Peewee Cellini."

"From *whom?*"

"Yo' don't know him, Tom. I'll tell yo' all about him by-'m-by."

Gulliver held the carton as if it were a priceless treasure and chuckled as he carried it up the ramp into the plane.

Tom Quest went aboard with as much as he could carry and then returned for another load.

"What in the world," he asked, "is all this stuff?"

"We got no time for talkin' now. Where's Whiz Walton?"

"He went to make a phone call."

Gulliver said, "Humph. The chances are he figured it'd be a good way to git out o' helpin' me load my stuff into the plane."

Gulliver's precious medicine chest was loaded last of all. It was a stout chest made of wood and bound with iron. It was a chest that went back to the days of sailing vessels when first aid and medication had to be reduced to the simplest of terms. The jars and bottles in the chest were identified by numbers rather than names.

Gulliver had memorized most of those numbers. He knew, for example, that a certain number represented a headache remedy, another an antiseptic lotion, while an-

other number would be used for insect bites, sunburn and so on. There had once been a book of instructions but this had been lost before the chest came into Gulliver's possession. But it didn't matter. The big man had learned how to use the contents by a trial-and-error method. The things he had found useless had been thrown away and the numbered container used for other things like gun oil, boot grease, sugar, salt, pepper and spices which Gulliver particularly favored in his cooking.

Gulliver personally carried the chest aboard the plane and placed it next to the chair he planned to use. He tugged on a strap of braided rawhide that connected the two upper pockets of his expansive vest and pulled out a watch the size of a small alarm clock.

"It's time to git gittin'," he said. "Now where in thunder is Whiz Walton?"

"Relax," called Whiz from the door of the plane. "I'm here."

Gulliver tapped his watch and said, "We was just about to leave without yo'. Come in an' shut that door behind yo'."

CHAPTER 8

The Medicine Chest

The log read "June 17, 12:02—took off, New York City."

As soon as the plane was off the ground, Gulliver heaved a sigh of relief. The big city and its crowds were confusing to a man who was at his best on Texas plains, in wilderness or jungle country. He had been out of his element in New York. From now on, he could speak with a lot more authority.

Tom Quest said, "You were on the phone a long time, Whiz. Did you learn anything new about John Hanford?"

"There's a dragnet out. The police have his description and they're watching for him at airports and railroad stations. I don't think he can get away from the city without being spotted."

"Did they get any clues from the bomb?"

"They've done a lot of checking up since last night.

The bellhop who delivered the bomb got it from a newspaper boy on the corner. Someone gave the newsboy five bucks to take the package to a bellhop, but the kid couldn't remember what the man looked like. As for the bomb itself, most of the parts were bought in New York."

"They were?"

"Yes. The police couldn't trace the TNT, but the batteries, the coil and the alarm clock were all bought in Macy's. The cardboard box came from a Fifth Avenue candy store and so did the wrapping paper."

Gulliver broke in, "Tom told the lawmen that someone was inquirin' about him at the hotel desk."

Whiz Walton nodded. "That," he said, "was a man named Croyden."

"Oh, I can tell you about him," put in Perro quickly. "I have already told you how I wanted to locate Tom Quest. After the way I was threatened, I did not dare inquire personally. It was I who employed Mr. Croyden."

The reporter said, "The police found that out, Perro."

"How about fingerprints?" asked Tom. "Were there any fingerprints on the package that held the bomb?"

"Lots of them, but none belonging to John Hanford."

"Is that," asked Gulliver, "all yo' got to tell us, Whiz?"

"That's the news up to the present time."

The plane moved through a cloudless sky at high altitude, following the Atlantic seaboard. The engines had settled to a steady drone that was barely audible in the soundproof cabin.

Gulliver lumbered to his feet. "I figure," he said, "it's about time we et. I didn't have time to do much shoppin' for this first meal because I used up about an hour ar-

guin' with Peewee Cellini." Once again that mischievous twinkle came into his deep-set eyes. "But it was worth while."

"That reminds me," said Tom, "you promised to tell us what you got from him."

"Later on, Tom. First I got to lay out the sandwiches an' stuff."

"Sandwiches," repeated Whiz Walton scornfully. "If that's the way you're going to feed us, you better let someone else take over the commissary."

Gulliver was unperturbed. "I'll do better next meal," he said, "after I do a little shoppin' when we land in Miami."

He unwrapped a number of packages and laid out an assortment of sandwiches, using the top of his medicine chest as a table. His purchases included several kinds of cheese, a jar of pickles, olives, and two one-gallon vacuum jugs which he placed on the floor. He had also brought along a few tin cups and cardboard plates.

"This kind of eatin' don't have much authority," he said, piling sandwiches on two of the plates, "but it'll tide us over to Miami." He picked up the loaded plates. "I'll take these up to the pilots but don't yo' wait for me. Yo' just pitch right in an' start eatin'. I'll catch up to yo'."

"We know you will," the reporter muttered.

He and Tom chose sandwiches and told Perro to help himself. The man from Ecuador studied the assortment carefully before making his choice. He finally selected what he wanted and ate daintily with the sandwich held between his thumb and one finger. He merely nibbled at the food, but Tom and Whiz ate heartily.

They each finished two sandwiches and were starting on the third. Then Gulliver returned and began operations with devastating effect on the pile of food. He didn't bother to make a selection. He simply took the sandwiches as they came.

Alonzo Perro brushed his hands against each other, then drew a fine handkerchief from the breast pocket of his coat and touched his lips. He smoothed his mustache and said, "I do not wish to seem greedy—"

"Greedy!" exclaimed Gulliver. "Yo' ain't et enough to satisfy a gopher on a diet. Wade in an' help yo'self."

"No, I have had plenty. I was just about to ask if there was something to drink in those." He pointed to the vacuum jugs on the floor.

"Sure thing. One is milk, ice cold. The other is coffee, pipin' hot." Gulliver at that moment had two sandwiches in his left hand and an assortment of pickles and olives in the right. "My hands," he said, "are sort o' busy. Pour out what yo' want."

Perro removed the cap of the jug that held coffee. Steam rose as he filled a tin cup. "It is hot," he muttered.

"Yo' better put that cap back on so's it'll keep that way. If they's anythin' I don't like it's cooled-off coffee. There ain't nothin' more pulin'."

Perro followed the suggestion and then picked up his cup. At that moment the plane hit an unexpected air pocket and gave a single violent jounce. Scalding hot coffee splashed from the cup to the back of Perro's hand. He dropped the cup and cried out in pain.

Tom Quest leaped to his feet. "Oh, golly," he said, "that must hurt like fury. Where's that first-aid kit?"

"In back with the other luggage," answered Whiz. "Probably buried."

"First-aid kit, my eye!" barked Gulliver. "What do yo' want o' that? I got my medicine chest right here." One sweep of his big hand cleared the top of the chest. Sandwiches, cheese, pickles, olives, plates, cups—everything flew to the floor.

"Not that, Gulliver," said Tom. "I'll get the regular kit."

"You'll never find it in all the stuff," said Whiz.

Tom reversed his route. He hurried toward the control cabin. "The pilots have one," he said. "I'll get it."

Perro meanwhile moaned in pain. Gulliver threw back the lid of his medicine chest and said, "I got some stuff right here to fix yo' up."

Whiz Walton grabbed Perro's wrist.

Perro's groans of anguish filled the cabin. "Do something," he begged. "Do something quickly. I cannot stand this pain."

"Stand still so I can see it," the reporter snapped at the writhing South American.

"Oh, Santa Maria! This pain will kill me!"

Whiz held the slender wrist firmly and looked at the reddened hand and then at Gulliver.

The big fellow had taken two wide-mouthed bottles from his chest. He held one in each hand and squinted at them dubiously. "I wish I knew which was which," he muttered. "I know that either seventy-one or seventeen is good for burns of all kinds, but I ain't sure which one it is."

Whiz saw the numbers and stared aghast. He knew

about the two uncertain bottles. One held an ointment for the treatment of burns, but the other held a chemical that was used instead of a red-hot iron for branding cattle. The reporter had once had a narrow escape when Gulliver had wanted to try the greasy mixture on a case of sunburn.

"I could," muttered Gulliver, "put a little smidge o' number seventeen on that there burn, an' if it starts smokin', I'll know that it's number seventy-one that's good for burns." Gulliver unscrewed the cap of seventeen and sniffed. "This could be it," he said. He poked at the ointment with a wooden spatula.

Whiz said, "No, no, Gulliver! Wait for Tom to bring the kit!"

Meanwhile Perro squirmed and moaned. "I cannot stand this pain," he cried. "I must have relief. I must have help. Do not torture me like this!" He gave a sudden wrench and freed his wrist from Walton's grip. He stuck it toward Gulliver. "Fix it!" he almost screamed.

"Don't say that!" barked Whiz Walton.

Gulliver looked at the gob of white stuff on the end of the flat splinter and pondered.

"You torture me!" yelled Perro. Then he acted so suddenly that neither of the others could stop him. He snatched the spatula from Gulliver's hand and smeared the ointment on his burn.

Whiz Walton gulped and looked wide-eyed.

Gulliver looked alert. "Now," he muttered, "I'll know which is which."

And then he knew. He would have known with his eyes closed. The corrosive grease had not been formu-

lated to make life easier for cattle. It had been developed solely for the benefit of the cattlemen who did the branding. It eliminated the nuisance of building fires to heat the branding iron. It had proved its value. It had seared the toughest cowhide in Texas—permanently.

The skin on the back of Alonzo Perro's frail hand was not as tough as cowhide. Moreover, it had been made extremely sensitive by scalding coffee.

Yes, Gulliver now knew which of the jars held branding salve. And so did Whiz Walton and Tom Quest, who came from the pilot's cabin on the run.

Alonzo Perro's scream was something that defied description. It outclassed all his previous wails—it made even Gulliver wince.

Tom Quest didn't have to ask what had happened. He saw the white smear on the back of Perro's hand and the open jar that Gulliver held.

Gulliver pointed to Perro and said, "He did it himself, Tom. I didn't do it." He could have said anything. It didn't matter because no one could have heard his words above the noise that Perro was making.

Tom Quest tossed the pilots' first-aid kit to Whiz and grabbed the agonized man's wrist. With wild cries paralyzing his eardrums, he snatched out his handkerchief and wiped away the branding salve, and with it, some of the scalded flesh.

He knew just one thing about the preparation. It depended on an acid for its action. An alkali should neutralize it. While his fingers gripped Perro's wrist like a vise, he grabbed a bottle of spirits of ammonia from the kit. He pulled the stopper with his teeth and doused the

inflamed patch of skin. After waiting a few seconds he mopped up the ammonia and applied a soothing unguent, then bandaged the hand lightly.

It was some time before Alonzo Perro subsided.

Gulliver said he was sorry, but the satisfaction of knowing the contents of the numbered jars made his statement sound a bit unconvincing.

"Y'know," he told Perro, "yo're lucky."

"Lucky?" Perro's voice was thin. He shook his head slowly. "Don't say that."

"Yo' sure are lucky," insisted Gulliver. "That there stuff yo' smeared on yo' hand was old an' sort o' worked out. If it had o' been fresh, it would o' had twice as much authority."

Gulliver was genuinely sorry for the little Ecuadorian, and so were Tom and Whiz. They did their best to make him comfortable and to take his mind off the throbbing torture of his burn.

Gulliver brought out the things he had bought in New York.

There was a dazzling assortment of rings, pins, beads, gewgaws, brooches, earrings, bracelets and other articles of jewelry—all of which had come from the five-and-ten-cent store. One package held several pounds of colored glass marbles. There was a wooden case full of the cheapest kind of tin kitchenware and a cardboard carton full of woolen yarn—the kind that sweaters are made of. A hamper was filled with remnants of brightly colored cloth.

Though it was June, Gulliver had found and purchased Christmas tree ornaments, the unbreakable variety, and

tinsel. He had a small windup phonograph and two boxes of records. One box included vocal solos and orchestral selections. The other held records that had been made for use by the sound effects departments of radio stations. There were recordings of trains crashing, trees falling and crowd noises. There were auto horns, train whistles, wild animal cries. There were a lot of sounds in that box.

"And I,'" murmured Whiz Walton, "thought I knew my way around New York. Where in blazes did you find all that junk?"

Gulliver grinned delightedly. "I figured that the critters that drive them taxicabs should know their way around," he said. "So I collared one o' them an' signed him up for the mornin'. He showed me where to go to get the stuff I needed."

"Stuff you needed!" exclaimed the reporter. "What are you going to do in Peru? Open a trading post?"

"Nope. I'm goin' to be a brujo."

"Huh?"

"A brujo," repeated Gulliver. "This here stuff is so I can make brujería."

"Wait a minute," Whiz said. "Let's start the dialogue over. I'm not getting it."

Tom Quest broke in. "Brujo is the Indian word for witch doctor," he explained. "I suppose brujería means magic, or something like that."

"That's it," nodded Gulliver. "Somethin' like that. I figure we can wangle a lot o' favors out o' them head-huntin' critters with stuff like this to swap. But this ain't all. I been savin' the best for last."

Tom pointed to the carton that had held corn flakes. "That one," he said. "What's in it?"

Gulliver tore off a strip of gummed paper and reached into the carton. He held up a cylinder about an inch and a half in diameter and six inches long. "Yo' know what this is?"

"It's a Very shell," responded Whiz Walton. "It's used in a Very pistol as a signal. Ships use them instead of rockets. They're also used as signals in airplanes."

"Yo're almost right," nodded Gulliver.

"Almost right, my eye. I'm one hundred per cent right. I bought the pistol and shells."

"The ones yo' bought, Whiz, was ordinary shells. They was fixed to explode in the air an' drop out a colored flare that was hung from a parachute."

"Aren't those ordinary shells?"

"Nope. I got these from Peewee Cellini."

"Who's he?"

"Well, he's a quarter-pint critter that makes fireworks. His real name is Angelo Somethin'-or-other Cellini, but I call him Peewee. I located him through the driver o' my taxicab. He took the insides out of a few Very shells an' filled 'em different."

"Different?" questioned the newspaperman hollowly.

"When I fire these here shells into the air, they bust open an' let out a shower o' tinsel an' beads an' bright paper stars an' suchlike. Them Injuns'll think I can make it rain fancy doo-dads." Gulliver chuckled happily. "I'll be the doggonedest brujo them jungle hombres ever seen. Especially when I cut loose with the fireworks!"

"Fireworks!" It was Tom who spoke.

"If Perro knows anything about the jungle Injuns, he'll tell yo' how they'll go for my kind o' magic."

But Perro had apparently been weakened by his recent ordeal. He slept. Gulliver pulled a blanket from the rack overhead and tossed it over the little man from Ecuador, muttering, "The poor critter. He sure had a spell o' rough goin'."

Then he returned to the carton and swung the top wide open. It was filled with colored flares, skyrockets, pinwheels, Roman candles, firecrackers, aerial salutes and other Fourth-of-July equipment.

"Now I've seen everything," exclaimed Whiz Walton. "That stuff is illegal. It can't be bought in New York State."

"I bought this," said Gulliver simply.

"But how? Where?"

"Peewee."

"If the law catches up to him—"

"He's got a license. He's fixin' up all kinds o' fireworks for the public displays on the Fourth. Yo' ought to see some o' the stuff he's workin' on. He's got a big sign that says 'Good Night' in letters ten feet high."

"Even so, he's not supposed to sell that stuff."

"That's what he told me," replied Gulliver.

"But you argued with him?"

"It wasn't much of an argument, Whiz. I just filled up this box with what I thought I could use, then told him that he could take the cash I put on the table, or take the stuff away from me—by force."

Whiz looked at Gulliver's huge frame and said, "How much did Peewee weigh?"

"I'd say about eighty-five pounds."

"You're lucky he didn't decide to use force," said Whiz sarcastically.

Gulliver nodded soberly. "Maybe he would of," he came back, "if he hadn't seen that the cab driver was on my side."

Whiz Walton pressed his hands to his forehead and closed his eyes. "Shades of brujería," he murmured unhappily, "what are we in for in Peru?"

CHAPTER 9

Thief in Miami

The log read "June 17, 17:56—landed Miami."

The plane came in over the administration building and ran to the far edge of the landing strip. It turned and taxied back to a take-off position, ready for refueling for the flight to Balboa.

Tom Quest folded the map he had been reading and tossed it on his chair. He stood up and stretched. "We're going to get out here, aren't we?" he asked.

"I know I am," replied Whiz Walton.

Gulliver said, "I aim to buy some stuff while the plane is bein' gone over." He pushed to his feet and looked at Alonzo Perro. "Still sleepin'," he observed. He tucked the blanket a little more closely around the man from Ecuador and laid the bandaged hand on top of the blanket. "It'd be a shame to wake him up. We'll leave him here. I sure hope he didn't burn his hand too bad."

Tom and Whiz followed Gulliver out of the plane. At the foot of the ramp, the big man pulled out his watch and said, "It's four minutes to six."

Tom Quest's watch had a twenty-four hour face. "I have seventeen fifty-six," he said.

"Aw-w, this here newfangled way o' scorin' time gets under my hide." Gulliver tapped the face of his own timepiece. "This here says it's almost six o'clock an' when it says half past six we got to be on our way again."

He spotted the pilots coming from the plane. "Hey, yo'," he bellowed. "How long'll it take yo' to git the gas yo' need?"

"We can be ready to go in about twenty minutes," the senior pilot replied as he joined his passengers. He pointed to a gas wagon. "Here comes the refueling crew."

Gulliver nodded and said, "I got some things to buy, but I'll be back in twenty minutes or so. Yo' see that we're ready to take off."

The senior pilot nodded and he and the copilot headed toward the administration building to make the routine report.

"Where are you going, Gulliver?" asked Tom.

Gulliver pointed to a row of shops beyond the parking lot. "I reckon I can find what I want over there," he said. "Do yo' want to come with me?"

Whiz Walton said, "I've got to get to the telephone."

"For what?"

"I want to call New York."

"About Hanford?"

The reporter nodded. "There might be some new developments by this time."

"All right, Whiz, but yo' be back here on time. Yo' comin' with me, Tom?"

Tom nodded and moved away with Gulliver.

Gulliver found a store that was well stocked with condiments, hot peppers and spices without which he considered frijole beans hardly worth preparing. He made his purchases, paid for them and stood waiting for his change.

It was then that Whiz Walton entered the store. "I thought I'd find you here," he said.

Tom Quest knew by the reporter's manner that Whiz had something to say. "What is it?" he asked.

"Did yo' git yo' call through to New York?"

"Yes. The New York police had a report from the prison where Hanford had been held. The prison authorities found the car that had been used for the escape. It was a car that had been reported stolen the morning of the jail break."

"Are they sure it's the right car?" asked Tom.

"No doubt of it. They found John Hanford's fingerprints on the right front door and the dashboard. They also found blood on the front seat."

"The guard nicked the critter when he was makin' his escape," Gulliver put in.

"Yeah, but they couldn't have hurt him very badly. He managed to get from that prison all the way to New York."

"What about the driver of the car?" Tom asked the question.

"There were fingerprints on the steering wheel. They probably belonged to the driver, but they haven't been

identified. Now hold onto your hats. Here's a new angle. The police think the car was driven by a girl."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Tom Quest.

"By thunder," Gulliver boomed, "yo' don't suppose it could've been Miss Barbara, do yo'?"

The reporter said, "Hanford's stepdaughter? Not a chance. In the first place, her testimony helped send Hanford to jail. In the second place, she was at her home here in Florida."

"Couldn't they tell whether it was a man or woman at the wheel of the car?" Tom asked.

Whiz said, "No one got a close look at the driver."

"Where did they find the car?"

"It was abandoned on a country road about thirty miles from the prison."

"And several hundred miles from New York," Tom added. "Hanford must have traveled fast to get to New York in time to pick up the things he needed to make that bomb."

"He must have had someone waiting for him in a plane."

"Was there any sign of a plane having landed near the place where the car was found?"

The newspaperman said, "I didn't hear anything about that, Tom. I should have thought to ask that question."

Gulliver pointed to a clock on the wall. "We better git back to the plane," he said. He tucked his purchases beneath his arm and left the store.

The trio took a short cut through the parking lot and went through a gate to the field.

"Look!" exclaimed Tom. "Something's going on over there near our plane."

A small group had gathered next to the ramp. The uniformed pilots were in the center of the group which included a ground man in white coveralls, a police officer and several men in business suits. Alonzo Perro stood on the ramp next to the cabin door.

"What's it all about?" demanded Tom as he ran up to the group.

"Lemme through," barked Gulliver, elbowing a couple of men aside. One of them was the police officer.

"Who are you?" demanded the blue-coated man.

"Gulliver! What's it to yo'?"

"We chartered the plane," said Whiz Walton. "What's all the excitement?"

"A thief! A robber!" cried Perro.

Several people uttered exclamations which were stilled abruptly when Gulliver boomed a demand for "Quiet!"

Perro told the story.

He had been asleep and had wakened to find himself alone in the cabin. He had seen the ground crew drive away, and had, for a moment, considered going out to stretch his legs. But he was tired.

He closed his eyes again, then heard someone enter the cabin, but remained slumped low in his seat assuming that the one on board belonged there. After several minutes of silence, he sat up straight and turned in his seat. He was surprised to see a total stranger. The stranger had been equally surprised to find an occupant in the plane.

"He ran out the door," Perro said. "I ran to the door and shouted. I waved my arms and cried for someone to

stop the intruder, but my cries were drowned by the noise of a plane that was coming in. By the time I attracted attention, the prowler was out of sight."

"Did he steal anything?" asked Tom.

"He held something in his hand. It looked like a map."

"Whatever it was," broke in Gulliver, "we can replace it. We can't hang around here while the lawmen hunt down a prowlin' coyote. The chances are he was just a souvenir hunter or somethin'."

Airport officials and police wanted to get signed statements from Perro, but Gulliver waved them aside.

"We're already late gittin' under way," he said, "an' I don't aim to git no later."

"But, Gulliver," Tom said, "I left some maps on my seat. If he got those—"

"If he did, we'll get more maps in Guayaquil."

Gulliver herded his companions into the cabin and told the pilots to get started.

The ramp was pulled away; the cabin door was closed. The motors were started and while the pilots revved them up and checked their instruments, Gulliver said, "By the way, Tom, what maps did you leave on your seat?"

"The handmade one," Tom replied. "The one that John Hanford made ten years ago."

Gulliver said, "Thunderation! That's the only one in the bunch we can't replace. That's the one that shows all the details o' the route your father took into the Peruvian jungle."

"Who in blazes would steal a thing like that?" growled Whiz Walton. He turned to Perro. "Couldn't you describe the guy?"

Perro nodded vigorously. "Of course I can," he said, "but Gulliver would not let me."

"I didn't want to waste no more time talkin' to all them officials that probably couldn't o' found the prowlin' critter anyhow, but yo' can describe him now, 'Lonzo. What'd he look like?"

Perro described the man as tall and thin to the point of emaciation. As he went into further details about the hair and forehead and a peculiar expression in the eyes, sunken cheeks and lips so thin that the mouth appeared as little more than a slit, Tom Quest reached into an envelope and drew out a photograph while Whiz Walton and Gulliver exchanged glances of incredulity.

Tom handed the picture to the man from Ecuador.

"Yes, yes!" Perro said excitedly. He stabbed at the photograph with a slender finger of his unbandaged hand. "That is the man! I would never forget that face!"

"Holy mackerel!" Whiz Walton exclaimed. "John Hanford!"

CHAPTER 10

Beeline to Balboa

The log read: "June 17, 18:35—took off Miami."

That meant six thirty-five by Gulliver's watch, but Gulliver wasn't looking at his watch. He had exploded with red-eyed rage when Perro identified John Hanford as the man who had stolen the map.

"Thunderation," he began, "to think that while we calf around with shoppin', Hanford coyotes right here into the plane! That makes me so mad I could bite myself! I got to air my lungs!"

Gulliver's heavy voice boomed like sustained thunder and his ripping expletives left no doubt about his feelings. "That poisonous pelican!" he barked. "If I could git my hands on him right now while I'm awearin' war paint, I'd collect enough o' his hide to make a saddle cover."

He took a deep breath and then went on while the plane reached cruising altitude and leveled off on a

straight line toward the Canal Zone and the airport at Balboa. He subsided at four thousand feet, but his face retained a dark scowl. He looked at his companions.

"I'm done," he said. "Now it's yo' turn to speak. Have any of yo' got anythin' to say?"

Tom shook his head and said, "I guess you spoke for all of us."

Whiz Walton looked at Gulliver admiringly. "You just about covered the way I feel about John Hanford. There's nothing more to say."

"If there was, I would o' said it."

Gulliver settled himself in his seat and lapsed into a silence that endured for several moments. His fingernail, scratching at the bristles that had sprouted on his chin, was a sign that he was thinking deeply.

When he spoke his voice was slow. "I don't see how he could o' done it. It was just last night that Hanford sent that bomb to Tom's room at the hotel in New York. How could he git to Miami an' be there awaitin' us?"

"In a plane," replied Tom Quest promptly.

"But the law was watchin' all the airports an' railroad stations so's he couldn't escape." Gulliver turned to Whiz Walton. "Ain't that what yo' said?" he demanded.

The reporter nodded. "That's what I said, but Hanford might have left New York before the police sent out the order to be on watch."

"Maybe Hanford wasn't in New York at all."

Both Gulliver and Whiz looked at Tom Quest in surprise.

"Not in New York!" exclaimed Gulliver.

"We have no actual proof that he was there."

"But that bomb—"

"Now wait a minute," Tom interrupted. "Listen to me. We know Hanford is not working alone because he had a couple of men go to Mr. Perro's room. If he could hire men to do that, he could hire someone to take care of the bomb."

"But looka here, Tom," argued Gulliver, "the thing that made us suspect Hanford in the first place was the way yo' name was lettered on the package that held the bomb. It was his letterin'."

Tom nodded. "That's true," he said, "but it doesn't prove he was in New York *last night*. He might have made the bomb, addressed it and left it with someone to deliver while he came on to Miami."

Tom turned to Whiz Walton. "What do you think, Whiz?"

"The police learned that some of the parts of the bomb were bought in New York. Hanford was probably in the city, but he might have left before the bomb was delivered."

"But why would he go to Miami?" asked Gulliver.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"An' how'd he know we'd be landin' in Miami?"

"I don't know," Tom said. "There are a lot of questions I'd like to have answered. If Hanford wanted to blow us up in New York, why did he merely steal the map when he was in Miami? Stealing the map makes it look as if he's trying to interfere with our search. That's a lot different than trying to murder us."

"How serious is the loss of that map?" inquired Whiz.

"That map would o' helped a lot in the Jivaro country

along the Paute River," Gulliver replied. "There ain't no other charts o' that there region. But we'll git along without it. The whole point is just this—maybe Tom is right. Maybe John Hanford wasn't in New York. That don't matter. We know he's in Miami. What are we goin' to do about it?"

The columnist said, "I'll handle it. I'll have the pilot send a radio message to the Miami police. When they hear about Hanford, they'll see that he doesn't get out of Miami as easily as he got in." He strode to the pilot's compartment and closed the door behind him.

Gulliver's face twisted in deep thought. "I don't suppose," he muttered, "there could be any mistake about Hanford." He squinted appraisingly at Alonzo Perro, then he picked up the photograph and held it close to the Ecuadorian's nose. "Listen, half-pint—" he began.

Perro looked pained. "Please, señor, I do not like it when you call me such things."

"I ain't in no mood to shilly-shally about what I call yo'. Yo' just take a good look at this here picture an' make dead sure yo' didn't make no mistake."

"I am sure, señor. There is no doubt of it."

"All right, then. But I'm warnin' yo'. If yo've made a mistake, an' set us off on the wrong trail, I'll put yo' Panama hat through my finger ring without takin' yo' out from in under."

Perro drew himself up stiffly.

Tom spoke before the little man could give voice to his ruffled dignity. "Don't take Gulliver too seriously. He doesn't mean to insult you, Mr. Perro."

Perro relaxed and Gulliver muttered something inaudible.

"I try to help—" the little man began in an injured tone, "but Señor Gulliver acts as if it were my fault that the map was stolen. If he thinks that I—"

"We know it wasn't your fault," said Tom. "You've helped a lot by identifying the man who stole the map."

"I wish to help in every way possible. I do not forget that it is through your kindness that I am on my way home. You, Tom, have been very kind to me and I am most grateful. Perhaps if you told me more about your plans I could advise you. I am well informed on the jungle country."

"There's not much you don't already know, Mr. Perro. I guess we've already told you how my father and John Hanford were together on an expedition ten years ago."

"I know about that. You believed that everyone on that expedition had been killed. Then Señor Hanford came back alive."

"It was a big surprise to learn that he had survived," Tom said.

Perro nodded understandingly.

"Did Hanford give you any reason to believe that your father is alive?"

"I know my father is alive. Hanford tried his best to keep the truth from me. But Gulliver got tough and made Hanford talk." Tom reached into a leather case on the floor beside his seat. "I'll show you a couple of photographs," he said. "They were taken by a flier who bailed out over the jungle country."

Gulliver looked at his big watch. "It's past eatin' time," he observed as he gathered the purchases he had made in Miami and headed for the small galley near the tail of the plane. "I got to do somethin' about it."

Perro examined a photograph of three men standing against a background of tropical jungle growth.

"This," said Tom, pointing to the white man in the center, "is John Hanford."

"I recognize him."

"Look at this Indian," Tom said, indicating the dark-skinned man who stood next to the engineer. "Do you see what he's wearing around his neck?"

Perro scrutinized the picture of the half-naked savage. "I see something suspended from a string," he said, "but I cannot make out what it is."

"This will show you." Tom handed over a second photograph. "This is an enlargement of the ornament. It's shaped just like the pattern on my ring."

"I had noticed the ring," Perro replied. "You and Señor Gulliver have rings that are alike."

"My father designed the jewelry. He had a brooch and a pair of earrings made for my mother. When she died, he gave one of the earrings to Gulliver and one to me. He kept the brooch himself."

"He kept it?" Perro repeated in surprise. "Then why is it worn by this Jivaro. How did he get it?"

"He must have got it from my father. That Indian, whoever he is, knows what happened to Dad."

"In this picture," said Perro, tapping the photograph with his well-manicured fingernail, "the Indian is next to

John Hanford. Surely Señor Hanford would recognize the ornament, would he not?"

"Yes, of course he would. He knew Dad was alive, and he deliberately kept the news from us. I could forgive him anything but that."

"In this picture," Perro said, "he does not look like a criminal. There must have been some great reason why he needed money so badly that he was willing to become a murderer. Do you know why he wanted that money?"

"He said he wanted to build an airport in South America."

Perro looked at the picture again. "This Jivaro," he said slowly, "looks like one of the people who live in small villages along the Paute River. I have been in that part of the jungle. If it is your plan to search for this particular Indian, I, perhaps, might be of aid."

"Golly," replied Tom, "it would be swell if you could go with us."

Gulliver advanced with a dark frown on his battered face. "What's that yo're talkin' about, Tom?" he asked.

Tom's face was alight with enthusiasm. "Mr. Perro knows the Paute River country," he said. "He might be able to help us."

"I reckon we can manage without his help." Gulliver took the photographs from Perro's hand and passed them to Tom. "Yo' better put these away, Tom," he said, "they might git lost."

Tom was surprised and somewhat crestfallen. "If Mr. Perro is willing to help us," he said, "I don't see why—"

Gulliver cut in abruptly. "I got supper almost ready.

Yo' better go up to the pilot's cabin an' see if Whiz has finished sendin' word to the lawmen in Miami."

Tom nodded without speaking. He was puzzled. Gulliver seemed to have become definitely antagonistic toward the man from Ecuador. Tom wondered what had happened since the take-off at Miami to bring about the sudden change.

CHAPTER 11

Guayaquil

The log read: "June 18, 02:05—landed Balboa."

The four passengers had slept during the last few hours of the flight from Miami. When the plane landed at Balboa, Tom Quest and Gulliver wakened and stepped out to stretch their legs.

In forty-five minutes the amphibian was refueled and ready to begin the last lap of the journey.

Whiz Walton and Alonzo Perro had slept through the landing. They were still asleep when Tom and Gulliver went on board.

"Let's sit in the rear of the cabin," Tom said, "where we can talk without disturbing them."

Gulliver nodded agreeably and closed the cabin door.

The log read: "June 18, 02:55—took off Balboa."

The course was just to the east of due south and the plane flew near the eightieth meridian.

The republic of Ecuador and the equator, from which that country got its name, lay dead ahead. Somewhere beyond the spinning props lay Guayaquil and beyond that proud city, the steaming, fetid jungle of the Peruvian lowland and the mysteries it held.

"We're right on schedule," Gulliver said with satisfaction.

"Then you think we'll be in Guayaquil at seven o'clock?" asked Tom.

Gulliver nodded. "I let them pilots know I'd be downright disappointed if we was late."

Tom chuckled. "I suppose you also let them know that you got disagreeable when you were disappointed."

"Well—I disremember exactly how I put it, but I sort o' made sure that they won't waste no time."

"How's the airport in Guayaquil?"

"They say it's pretty good, but we ain't goin' to use it. I made arrangements to have our stuff picked up at the landin' ramp on the water front so we're goin' to land on the water."

"How long are we going to stay in Guayaquil?"

"I'm hopin' we don't have to spend more than one night there. We're goin' to have a downright busy day, Tom, gittin' everythin' lined up. Maybe yo' better git some more sleep."

"Golly, I don't want any more sleep, Gulliver. I've already had about five hours."

"Me too."

"You went to sleep before I did."

"I got tired o' listenin' to Perro showin' off how much he knowed about Ecuador and Peru. His talk was pulin'."

Tom became more sober. "What happened?" he asked abruptly.

"What do yo' mean?"

"You've taken quite a dislike to him."

"I never liked him from the start."

"Perhaps not, but at least you were civil to him until he offered to go into the jungle with us. Then you changed."

"We don't need him or his help, Tom. We can git along without him."

"Did he say or do anything in particular?"

Gulliver shook his head slowly.

"Well, what happened to make you so antagonistic? There must be some reason."

"Tom, it's nothin' I can put my finger on. I dunno what it is about him, but I just don't like him. There's somethin' about him that goes against my grain. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a posthole. What's more, he's got no sand in his gizzard. The way he yammered an' howled when he burned his hand was worse'n a locoed jackass in a tin barn."

"Well, golly, anyone would howl if he got some of that branding salve on a fresh burn. I saw his hand and it looked ugly."

Gulliver exhaled a snort of disgust. "No sand," he growled. "No guts. An' besides, he uses stuff on his hair that smells like sheep-dip."

"Nevertheless," argued Tom, "if he told us the truth about himself, he's a prominent man in Ecuador."

"A boil on the end of yo' nose is likewise prominent, but it's as useless as a barrel o' shucks."

"Well," sighed Tom, "if that's how you feel, I don't suppose there's any use trying to argue with you."

"Yo might just as well argue with the shadow o' death," Gulliver replied blandly. "But don't yo' worry none, Tom, I don't aim to iron him out as long as he behaves himself."

"You don't expect him to make any trouble, do you, Gulliver?" Tom inquired.

"I don't know. He's gittin' mighty curious about our business. When we git to Guayaquil, if he don't stick to his own knittin', I'll clip his horns so fast that lightnin' will seem to hang fire by comparison."

"He seems to know quite a bit about the jungle."

Gulliver snorted contemptuously.

"Well, at least, Gulliver," continued Tom, "he knows his way around Guayaquil. You'll have to admit that."

"I don't have to admit nothin'," Gulliver said stubbornly. "As for his knowin' Guayaquil, yo' just sit back an' listen. I'll tell yo' all yo' need to know an' a lot yo' don't need."

Tom listened while the big man talked. Gulliver told how old Spanish customs persisted in Guayaquil in spite of the fact that barely half a dozen families were of pure Spanish descent. He seemed almost childishly eager to convince Tom that he had all the facts at hand. His salty description of the city was interesting and Tom wanted to hear every word, but the rarefied atmosphere through which the plane traveled was a soporific that could not be ignored. Tom's eyelids became heavier and he had to fight to stay awake. Gulliver's subdued voice was a throaty rumble that blended with the dull drone of the engines

until the two became one. Tom's head nodded and his slow breathing told Gulliver that he slept.

The big man pulled a blanket from the overhead rack and covered Tom.

"Yo' git all the rest yo' can," he said softly, "there's no tellin' what yo'll be up against in the next few days."

Tom wakened to find Gulliver shaking him by the shoulders. He smelled coffee bubbling on the electric grill and bacon sizzling in a pan.

"The chuck is ready," Gulliver said. "Wake up an' eat 'er or I'll throw 'er out."

Tom blinked at the brilliant sunlight that streamed into the cabin. Whiz Walton and Perro were awake and freshly shaved. "It's a great day," the reporter said cheerily. "Wake up and see for yourself."

"Where are we?" asked Tom.

It was Perro who answered. "We are approaching Santa Elena. It is one of the fingers of land that makes the Half Moon Bay."

"That's right," agreed Whiz Walton. "Land ahead. Now I know how Columbus felt."

Gulliver turned the bacon. "What Perro means," he said, "is Salinas. Hardly anyone calls that place Santa Elena."

"Santa Elena or Salinas, it does not matter," Perro said airily. "It is all the same. Ah-h-h, you should see the city," he continued rapturously. "It is the playground of Ecuador. It is like your Atlantic City or your Coney Island."

"Like heck it is," countered Gulliver. "There ain't *no* place like them two."

The plane was flying low. The waves of the Pacific were easily discernible. By pressing close to the window, Tom could see the coast of South America ahead. He remembered some of the things he had read about Salinas. It was not only the playground of Ecuador; it was also relay station for the All-America Cables that link all the cities and important towns of the Americas. Here the messages between the continents as well as news dispatches are received and retransmitted.

Gulliver handed Tom a sandwich of crisp bacon between the halves of a toasted roll. "Yo' can eat while yo' watch," he said. "Keep yo' eyes on the ground. It's worth watchin'."

As the plane passed directly over Salinas, Tom could see the muddy, swirling waters of the Guayas River flowing into the sea.

"From here to Guayaquil it is but an hour by motorcar," Perro advised.

"From here to Guayaquil, it's nothin' but a hop an' a skip," corrected Gulliver as he eyed the small man. "We ain't travelin' by car."

The low-flying plane sped over the edge of green, billowy jungle and it was during these few minutes that Tom had a hint of some of the sinister creatures that peopled that jungle.

Gulliver pointed them out—the fat, ancient-looking alligators that plunged off the shore into the water as the plane roared over. "Anyone o' them critters," he explained, "would be downright eager to make a meal out o' one of us. We ain't agoin' to do much swimmin' on this here trip."

Then Tom saw Guayaquil. Ecuador's chief port spread over swampy plain on the broad estuary of the Guayas River, forty miles from the Pacific and just below the equator.

Descending on a long slant, the plane came down on copper-colored water that was as smooth as glass and taxied to the landing ramp.

"Ecuador," breathed Tom. "It's hard to believe we're really here. Yesterday morning at this time we were sleeping in a New York hotel."

Gulliver looked at his watch as the twin motors became silent. "Doggone," he said, "we're late. I figured on bein' here at seven A.M."

The log read: "June 18, 07:01—landed Guayaquil."

CHAPTER 12

The Grand Hotel

THE HEAT wave seemed to rise up and assail Tom Quest as soon as he stepped from the plane. The thermometer stood at a sizzling ninety.

"But you are fortunate," Alonzo Perro said. "If you had come here between January and March, you would have struck the wet season. During that time it rains every day."

"Yo' ain't tellin' me nothin'," put in Gulliver. "I was here durin' the wet season an' I wished I'd growed fins instead o' feet. Even when it wasn't rainin', it was downright uncomfortable. My clothes got sticky an' clinging' an' I felt like I was standin' over a vat o' boilin' tar." He turned to Whiz Walton. "Whiz, it was so dank my boots turned blue with mildew overnight."

"Right now," said Whiz, "it's hot." He eyed the sky. "And by noon it's going to be lots hotter."

"The heat down here ain't nothin'," replied Gulliver. "Why, back in Texas I've seen it so hot an' dry yo' had to prime yo'self to spit."

He turned to attendants who stood near by and gave instructions for unloading the plane.

Perro offered to assist but Gulliver rejected the offer sharply. "I," he said, "got everythin' arranged by letter."

Perro shrugged his narrow shoulders. "Muy bien."

"Hold on," put in Whiz Walton. "Maybe Perro can help us."

Gulliver frowned but said nothing.

The reporter turned to the small, dark-complexioned man. "You said you were pretty well known around Guayaquil. Is that true?"

"Sí, señor."

"In that case, you might get in touch with the police authorities and tell them all you know about John Hanford."

"Sí, sí."

"We'll give you a picture of Hanford. Tell the police he's a fugitive from justice. If they find him, they might get a reward."

"Golly, Whiz," said Tom, "do you think Hanford will follow us this far?"

"You never can tell. It won't do any harm to have the police on the watch for him."

"I," said Perro, "am indebted to you. If you had not permitted me to travel in your plane, I might have been assassinated in New York. I am a man who pays his debts. I wish to do anything I can to help you. I shall go to the police."

Gulliver moved toward the men who were unloading the plane and piling the cargo on the ramp. He talked to

the man in charge for a few minutes and then rejoined his friends.

"Everythin' is all set," he said. "The manager o' the hotel has done all I asked him to do. He's arranged for the handlin' of our stuff."

"Where does it go from there?" asked Tom, pointing to the ever-increasing pile.

"It'll be taken to the hotel where we'll be stayin'."

"What hotel?" queried Whiz Walton.

"It's called the Grand Hotel. I stopped there the last time I was down here. I know the gent that runs the place an' he's all right. He'll have a guide an' some cholo boys lined up for us."

"How long will we stay there?"

"I figure on clearin' out o' here tomorrow mornin'. As soon as the plane's unloaded, I'll settle up with the pilots. Meanwhile, we better git over yonder to the office an' dispose o' the customs rigmarole and our Peruvian visas."

Perro smiled eagerly and said, "I am well acquainted with the officials. I will go with you. Perhaps I can expedite matters."

Gulliver turned to face the small man squarely. "Can't yo' git it through yo' head," he said, "that we don't want no help from yo'? I tolerated yo' this far because there wasn't nothin' else to do, but now that yo're in yo' own back yard, yo' just go yo' own way an' don't bother lookin' over yo' shoulder to see what we're adoin'. Yo' just rattle yo' hocks an' don't stop for no kissin'."

Tom was surprised that Perro did not resent the big man's speech. Instead of showing anger, Perro smiled pleasantly and said, "As you wish, señor."

Gulliver reached out, gripped Perro by the shoulders and spun him so he faced in the opposite direction.

"Now," he said, "git gittin'. Lean forward an' shove."

Perro moved off. Gulliver turned to Tom and Whiz and said, "We got to be weavin' over to them customs officers. Let's amble."

After passing through the simple customs and health formalities, Tom and Whiz waited while Gulliver paid off the pilots and made sure the baggage would be properly attended to, then followed the big man to a cab that was waiting to take them to the Grand Hotel.

"I don't get it," Tom said during the short walk.

"What's that, Tom?" asked Whiz Walton.

"For some reason or other Gulliver dislikes Perro."

"He didn't like him from the start. I can't say I was too enthusiastic over him myself."

"I know that, Whiz, but at least he tolerated him. He was all right until the last part of the flight. Then he changed. He acts as if he resents Perro. Haven't you noticed it?"

"I noticed it, Tom. Perro can't open his mouth without getting a growl from Gulliver."

Tom said, "I wonder what's back of it."

"I don't know."

"Perro has done his best to be friendly. Gosh, when Gulliver told him off a few minutes ago, I thought Perro would blow his top."

"So did I," agreed the reporter.

"But he didn't. He just smiled at Gulliver."

"He smiled," repeated Whiz Walton, "with his mouth, but did you notice his eyes?"

"His eyes?"

"Yeah. There wasn't any smile in those dark eyes of his. I—" The reporter broke off abruptly. "Well, I'll be darned!" he exclaimed. "Some people just can't be squelched."

He pointed to the cab. Perro was in the rear seat with his Panama hat at a jaunty angle and a serene smile on his face.

Gulliver's huge fist shot out and grabbed the handle of the door. He nearly tore that door off its hinges.

"Yo', Perro!" he bellowed. "Git out o' there! This here is our cab an' we need all the room there is!"

Perro's smile gave way to a look of injured helplessness. "Señor," he said, "this is the only available transportation. I, too, am going to the Grand Hotel. Surely you do not mind if I ride with you."

"Thunderation!" roared Gulliver. "Can't yo' go nowhere without countin' on us to take yo'!"

Tom said, "What's the difference, Gulliver? There's room for all of us."

"If they's anythin' I hate, it's bein' cramped."

"Go on, Gulliver," said Whiz, prodding the big man, "get in and shut up."

Perro occupied about one third of the rear seat. Gulliver stepped in and plopped down filling the remaining two thirds.

"Whatever happens to yo'," he said to Perro, "just remember it was yo' idea."

Tom reached to fold down one of the two auxiliary seats, but Gulliver stopped him.

"Sit back here with me," he said, "sit next to the window so's I can point out parts o' the city we pass through."

Tom looked at the well-filled seat and laughed. "Are you kidding?"

"I'll make room for yo' an' I ain't kiddin'. I'll just slosh over."

Gulliver slid to his right and he wasn't gentle about it. Perro, wedged between the barrellike torso and the side of the cab, gasped as his ribs compressed the air out of his lungs.

"It's a good thing Perro don't object to crowdin'," grunted Gulliver, hitching farther to his right. He pointed to the space on his left and said, "Now, Tom, yo' sit down." He stuck one massive foot out, kicked down one of the folding seats, and said, "Come on, Whiz. Git in an' sit."

He returned his foot to the floor, setting it down hard.

Perro let out a gasp of pain. "My toe!" he wailed.

"It's crowded in here," Gulliver observed.

Whiz Walton climbed in and the ancient cab got under way.

On the avenue called Ninth of October the strains of martial music came through the open windows of the cab.

Gulliver became excited. "Slow down!" he ordered the driver. He pointed ahead. "Look over there, Tom," he said. "There's somethin' to see!"

A building was in flames. The volunteer fire fighters,

wearing blood-red shirts, white pants and patent leather boots had gone into action. A band played while the firemen worked.

The scene was one of wild confusion. Red-shirted men scurried in all directions trying to make their shouts heard above the music and the yells that came from an appreciative crowd. Everyone seemed gay, despite the leaping flames that were rapidly consuming the old building.

"Ain't that a sight?" demanded Gulliver enthusiastically. "That's the way they do things here in Guayaquil. When a fire breaks out, the band goes along with the firemen to keep the boys stirred up. If we had the time, I'd wait here to see the finish."

"The finish?" echoed Tom. "What is the finish?"

"That's the best part of it. When the fire is out, all the people cheer an' shout an' applaud the fire department. Then everyone stands at attention while the band plays the national anthem. I've paid money to see stage shows in New York City an' they can't hold a candle to this."

The rest of the ride was anticlimax, but Tom was fascinated by the brilliantly colored buildings of reinforced concrete and the many churches.

When the cab came to a creaking halt, Gulliver threw open the door and scrambled out ahead of the others. He burst into the cool arcade of the Grand Hotel. A tall, thin Spaniard looked up from his desk, then bounced to his feet and cried, "Señor Gulliver!"

"Lopez," boomed Gulliver. "How are yo'?"

"Muy bien," replied the other, beaming. "Muy bien." He extended both hands in a welcoming gesture.

"Now hold on a minute," Gulliver ordered. "Before we go any further I got to know if yo' took care o' things like I said in my letter. Did yo'?"

Miguel Lopez smiled widely and nodded his head vigorously. "I have done everything you requested. All has been taken care of."

He held up his left hand with the lean fingers spread wide apart. "Arrangements have been made to bring your baggage from the landing ramp," he said, touching his little finger.

"Two," he counted off, "I have a man who will serve as your guide. Three—your rooms are reserved on the second floor for one night—two nights—three nights—as long as you care to stay. Four—I have made the purchases you requested. Five—your visas to Peru are in order. Six—the countless little details are taken care of."

Gulliver exhaled a mighty sigh of relief. "Son," he said, "yo're all right. I figured I could count on yo' and yo' didn't let me down." He stuck out his mighty paw. "Shake hands, Miguel. I'm downright glad to see yo' again."

They shook hands, then Gulliver introduced Tom and Whiz Walton.

Looking over Tom's shoulder, Lopez saw Perro hovering in the background near the door.

"Did Señor Perro come with you?" he asked.

Tom replied, "Yes. He traveled in our plane from New York.

"Do yo' know him?" inquired Gulliver.

Lopez nodded. "He stays in this hotel when he is in the city."

"I hope," muttered Gulliver, "his rooms ain't too close to the ones yo' got set aside for us."

"You do not like him?"

"Oh, we have nothing against him," put in Tom quickly.

"We got no time to shilly-shally with talk that don't git no place," Gulliver said impatiently. "We got a lot o' things to take care o' between now an' when we leave tomorrow mornin'."

"You are going to stay but one night?" asked Lopez in surprise.

"We aim to clear out o' here at daybreak if we can git things set. I want to rent some cars to take us to Cuenca an' from there we can shove off into the jungle. Now where at is this critter yo' got lined up to guide us an' take charge o' the cholo boys?"

"I was most fortunate," said Lopez. "I was able to secure an especially reliable man."

He clapped his hands together and motioned to an Indian who had been sitting in a far corner. The copper-skinned man bounced to his feet and advanced with long, fast strides. His loose, ill-fitting white suit couldn't conceal the fact that he was lithe and arrowlike. Tom judged that the Indian was somewhere between thirty and thirty-five.

Lopez introduced the man as Manga and said, "He speaks a little English."

"In that case," Whiz Walton said, "we should get along swell. Gulliver speaks a little Jivaran."

Gulliver's face wore the one-eyed squint that signified appraisal. Silently he studied Manga from head to toe and back to head. Meanwhile Manga's dark eyes looked up at Gulliver's battered face without flinching.

Gulliver closed his fingers around the Indian's biceps, testing his muscles as one might test the tenderness of a chicken.

"Nothin' pulin' about him," he muttered.

Manga, his face without expression, felt of Gulliver's impressive muscles. Gulliver grinned, balled his fist and crooked his elbow to make his muscles bulge as far as possible.

The action brought a murmur from the Indian. "Jatun."

"What's that mean?" asked Whiz Walton.

Gulliver seemed highly pleased. "Jatun," he explained, "is the Injun word for big. Me," he said to Manga, stabbing his thumb toward his chest, "I'm plenty big—jatun-jatun. An' what's more—curaca."

Tom whispered to Whiz Walton, "Curaca's the word for chief."

The reporter wasn't listening. His eyes were glued on the face of the Indian. "Look at him, Tom," he muttered tensely. "Get a load of that! What's the matter with Manga?"

Manga's impassivity had fallen from him like a cloak. He trembled visibly and his eyes were wide. He shook his head violently in a gesture of negation.

"Non, non!" he said in a voice that trembled with fear. "You not Jatun-Jatun Curaca."

The way the Indian gave voice to the Jivaro words made them sound like a proper noun—like the name of a deity.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Gulliver. "What's the matter with yo'?" Turning to Lopez he demanded, "Is this critter off his feed?"

The hotel manager spoke to the Indian with a fast string of Jivaran words and many gestures. Whatever it was he said, the fear left Manga's face and his poise returned.

"What's this all about?" barked Gulliver.

Lopez smiled. "You, señor, called yourself Jatun-Jatun Curaca."

"Well, what about it? I just aimed to have it understood with Manga that I was the great big chief o' this here outfit an' there warn't none bigger. What's wrong with that?"

"There is, in the Jivaro country, one who is called Jatun-Jatun Curaca. He has become legendary. His magic and witchcraft has made his village more powerful than all others. He is feared by everyone. It is said that one has only to mention his name to bring down fires from heaven and sudden death."

Gulliver exhaled a snort of disbelief.

"Do not treat this lightly," said Lopez seriously.

"What's the name o' this here head-hunter that's got such strong brujería?"

"He is known only as Jatun-Jatun Curaca. The people of his village guard him jealously."

Gulliver nodded and said, "I savvy." He turned to Tom and Whiz and there was a twinkle in his eye. "Wait till some o' them Injun critters see the magic I'm agoin' to turn loose."

Manga spoke. "You," said he, pointing to Gulliver, "jatun curaca. You only big chief. You not great big chief."

Gulliver said, "That's all right with me, Manga. I'll settle for that."

"You boss man. You patronato."

"Now, then," said Gulliver, "yo're supposed to be in charge o' the cholo boys that are to tote our duffel an' yo're supposed to have them boys all lined up."

Manga nodded quickly. "Cholo boy ready," he said. "Some cholo boy here. We get others at Cuenca."

"How much do they think they're goin' to be paid?"

"Please, patronato," Manga said, "cholo boy want five sucre each day."

Gulliver looked horrified. "Five sucre!" he thundered. "Why, that's downright robbery! Any man that'd pay that price is as chuckleheaded as a prairie dog. I won't be took in." He smacked one fist against the palm of his hand. "Git this," he went on explosively, "before I'll pay any such price I'll do a rightabout-face an' I'll pull freight right back to Texas!"

The outburst had no effect on the impassive Indian. "Cholo boy wait in shade behind hotel," he said. "Me call in. You talk."

"I'll talk to them after I've talked to yo'. Now go on over there in the corner where yo' come from, Manga. I'll join yo' in a couple o' minutes."

Manga saluted and returned to his chair in the corner.

"Look here, Gulliver," Tom said softly, "it seems to me five sucres a day is dirt cheap."

"According to my information," said Whiz, "a sucre's only worth a few cents."

"It ain't high priced," said Gulliver, "but with these Injuns, yo' lose face if yo' give 'em their askin' price right off the bat. Yo' got to haggle over the price an' hammer 'em down at least fifty per cent so's to keep control o' the situation. If yo' don't, they'll keep raisin' the price every day an' they'll quit work if yo' don't meet every raise. I'll have a talk with Manga, then call in them cholo boys an' strike some kind o' bargain."

"It sounds like horse trading," observed Whiz Walton. "You should do all right."

Gulliver said, "I'll manage. Yo' an' Tom git the keys an' go on upstairs to our bedrooms."

"Your bags have already been taken up," put in Miguel Lopez.

"Good. Yo' two go on upstairs while I take care o' things down here."

"What about breakfast?" asked Tom. "I'm starved. That snack we had in the plane was just an appetizer."

"Can't we have some breakfast sent up to the room?" asked Whiz Walton.

"Sí, sí," replied Lopez, "I will attend to it."

"Don't figure on me," Gulliver said. "I'll eat down here in the café an' join yo' two later."

Alonzo Perro approached Tom and the reporter as the two stood at the desk awaiting their keys.

Nodding toward Manga, who talked with Gulliver in the corner, he said, "That is to be your guide?"

Tom said, "Yes."

"I am sorry your friend Señor Gulliver does not like me."

Tom started to say something but Perro held up his hand.

"It is all right, Tom. I understand. He is one of strong emotions."

"You can say that again," put in Whiz Walton.

"The fact that he dislikes me does not relieve me of my obligation to you. I want you to know that. I am indebted to you and if at any time I can be of assistance, I hope you will call on me."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Perro."

"Are you going to tell the police about Hanford?" asked the newspaperman.

"I shall do it within the hour."

Tom collected the keys and led the way up a single flight of broad stairs to the second floor of the Grand Hotel.

CHAPTER 13

Final Preparations

THE SECOND-FLOOR bedrooms of the Grand Hotel opened off a wide, uncarpeted corridor. The rooms reserved for Gulliver, Tom and Whiz Walton were consecutive but not connected.

In the center of the floor in the first room into which Tom and Whiz looked, stood Gulliver's duffel bag and his battered old medicine chest. The second room had been reserved for the columnist. A suitcase with Whiz Walton's name on it rested on a chair. Whiz, however, didn't stop there. With Tom he went on to the third bedroom.

Tom's room was larger than either of the others and the only one with an adjoining bath.

"That's for me!" exclaimed Tom.

"First come, first served," replied Whiz, pulling off his coat. "Race you!"

Tom's tie came off, and then his shirt. The race to undress was nip and tuck until Whiz Walton was delayed by a knot in his shoelace. Then Tom won easily and ducked beneath the shower.

By the time the two had finished bathing, a waiter was on hand with breakfast.

The food was good and there was lots of it. Tom and Whiz ate heartily and while they ate they talked about the curious manner of their guide when Gulliver had called himself the great big chief.

"Did you," asked the reporter, "notice Gulliver's face when he heard about that character?"

"You mean Jatun-Jatun Curaca?"

Whiz nodded. "Yeah," he said. "There was a glint in Gulliver's eye. He's not going to rest until he's shot off his fireworks and other white man's magic to prove to the savages that his brujería is stronger than theirs."

Tom grinned. "That will be something to see."

Whiz poured himself a second cup of coffee and lighted a cigarette. He leaned back in his chair with a sigh of contentment but his feeling of well-being was short-lived. Something like a riot broke out in the Grand Hotel.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed the reporter. "What's that?"

"Gosh, Whiz, I don't know. Maybe it's a revolution."

Tom jerked the door open and the bedlam increased. It came from many voices jabbering unintelligibly.

"Whatever it is," said whiz, "I've got to see it."

But Tom was in the lead. He pounded down the hall to the head of the stairs and there he stopped abruptly.

"Look!" he exclaimed, pointing to a mass of half-naked Jivaros surrounding Gulliver.

"Wherever there's a riot," Whiz Walton said, "you'll find Gulliver in the center."

The natives were all talking at once and gesticulating wildly, but Gulliver was unperturbed. He stood like a towering rock and from time to time his own voice boomed above all others.

And then Tom saw that most of the Indians held up three fingers and shouted a word that sounded like "Manadin" which they kept repeating.

Gulliver, meanwhile, held up one finger and his thundering bellow sounded like "Chikichiki."

Tom laughed. "It's no riot. Those are the cholo boys. Gulliver's negotiating with them."

"So that's how they negotiate in Ecuador!"

"Yes. Don't you remember? Manga said the boys wanted five sucres a day. Gulliver's holding up one finger and the others are holding up three."

"That must mean that Gulliver is offering one sucre and the Indians have come down to three."

At this moment, Gulliver stopped shouting and lowered his hand. He took a deep breath, held it for a moment and then released it in a shout that fairly rocked the building. The Indians were shocked into silence. During that pause. Gulliver raised his right fist slowly and impressively. He unfolded first one finger and then, as if grudgingly, another. The two fingers stuck out, forming a "V." Tension seemed to grip the room.

Gulliver shouted one word, "Himer!"—meaning two.

It was a signal for rejoicing. Each dark-skinned face

broke into a wide grin showing yellow teeth. The Indians duplicated Gulliver's gesture, shouting, "Himer, himer," and then broke into clacking exclamations of satisfaction.

Gulliver had to yell to make himself heard when he spoke to Manga. "Now we got a contract," he cried. "Herd those boys outside an' we'll look over the gear."

Manga brought order with a few sharp commands. Striding with great dignity, he left the arcade, followed by his crew.

Tom and Whiz ran down the stairs to join Gulliver, who was grinning happily.

"Did yo' see that!" he said. "Them critters must have thought they was dealin' with a tenderfoot."

"Instead of a horse trader," added Whiz. "I'm sorry for them."

"Aw-w, shucks," Gulliver said, "they're downright lucky they didn't git me in a real horn-tossin', horse-tradin' mood. If I'd o' been at my best, I could o' had 'em payin' *me*." He changed the subject abruptly. "I hope yo' two have et because if yo' ain't, yo' don't."

"We have," said Tom.

"We got to git outside an' inventory our stuff."

On the way to the door, Gulliver paused to speak to Señor Lopez, the manager. "I sure hope," he said apologetically, "yo' didn't mind me usin' yo' hotel to line up my boys. It was a mite noisy for a spell."

The manager smiled and bowed. "Señor Gulliver," he said, "I expected you to make a little noise. I remember when you were here ten years ago."

Going through the door Whiz Walton muttered, "How could anyone forget him?"

In addition to the equipment that had been unloaded from the plane there were a number of items that had been delivered to the hotel from dealers in Guayaquil in accordance with Gulliver's instructions. Altogether, the boxes and packages made an impressive stack in front of the hotel.

"I didn't realize we had so much," Tom said. "Do we have to carry all that stuff through the jungle with us?"

"The cholo boys will do the totin'. All these things have got to be sorted out into packs that the boys can carry on their shoulders. We got to keep each pack down to seventy pounds, an' each one o' them has got to be watertight on account o' mud an' rain."

"It looks," observed Whiz Walton, "as if we have a job on our hands."

"Yo' part," Gulliver said to the reporter, "is to keep an inventory so's we know what we got, what pack it's in, an' who's carryin' the pack."

"From columnist to bookkeeper in one easy jump," Whiz muttered.

"I figured bein' used to writin' things yo' would be the one to handle the inventory end."

"I see," replied Whiz; and then he added dryly, "My newspaper training will be a big help—in a pig's eye."

Gulliver gave a hitch to his belt. "We better git started," he said. "I got transportation ordered for first thing tomorrow mornin'. We go as far as Cuenca on wheels, but after that, things will be different."

Tom rolled up his sleeves and said, "The sooner we get started, the better. What are we going to do to keep the things watertight?"

"I got that all took care of. In back o' the hotel there's a stack o' boxes that I arranged for. They're boxes that was used for shippin' dried fish from Scandinavia."

"Are you kidding?" asked Whiz.

"This," replied Gulliver seriously, "ain't the day for kiddin'. Lopez had them boxes all boiled out an' cleaned with lye. They still smell a little lively, but that won't bother us none. Each one o' them boxes has got four tin cans inside it. They'll hold the food, ammunition an' everythin' else that's twelve inches or smaller an' keep it airtight."

Gulliver raised his hand and snapped his fingers.

Manga, who had been squatting with the other Indians on the sidewalk, bounced up and saluted.

"Take some o' the boys around to the back an' git them boxes that's stacked up there," ordered Gulliver.

Manga saluted again and went to carry out the order.

It took the better part of the day to get everything packed and ready for the trek. As the work went on, Gulliver told Tom and Whiz something of the Jivaro people.

"They're a peculiar bunch o' critters," he began, and then proceeded to prove the statement. Of all the Indians in South America, the head-hunting Jivaros were least touched by whites. Primitively conservative, they were difficult to deal with. They lived in small villages along the rivers and were extremely superstitious. If

anything occurred to displease them to the smallest degree, they simply evaporated silently and instantly, a whole village at a time.

"They make a big thing out o' brujería," Gulliver went on. "That's their black magic or what they call jambi. They call most everythin' in the line o' magic or medicine jambi. In most every village they's a witch doctor called brujo."

A mischievous glint came into Gulliver's eye. "I aim to demonstrate that I'm somethin' of a brujo myself. Maybe we'll run acrost that critter that's said to be the biggest brujo in the jungle."

"Jatun-Jatun Curaca," murmured Tom.

"Yep."

"Old J. J. C. himself," added Whiz.

It took some time to get the work well organized. All packages had to be opened and the contents sorted and examined. Some supplies had to be made readily accessible in the event of an emergency. Other supplies were carried only as reserve equipment.

There was a brief halt at noon for luncheon and then the packing continued through the hottest part of the day. It was after sundown when the last of the goods were packed and final instructions given to Manga. During that time there had been no further word from Alonzo Perro.

"I wonder," said Tom, "if he told the police about John Hanford."

"He said he would," replied Whiz.

Gulliver grumbled, "I wouldn't trust him no farther'n I could see a black cat at midnight."

"I guess it doesn't matter much," Tom said. "I don't think we'll hear any more about John Hanford, at least not after we're across the boundary into Peru. If you can call it a boundary."

"We better turn in early," Gulliver said. "We're goin' to start at sunup."

Whiz Walton stretched. "Me," he yawned, "I'm going to have a good night's sleep."

All three proved to be poor prophets. Tom was mistaken about John Hanford; Gulliver about the start at dawn; and Whiz Walton's slumbers were disturbed by an event that nearly cost Tom Quest his life.

CHAPTER 14

Prowler in the Night

Tom Quest went to bed exhausted but the minute his head touched the pillow, his mind became active. The map of Southern Ecuador and Western Peru had been indelibly impressed on his brain. He could see the route in every detail just as Gulliver had charted it. As far as Cuenca the trek would be over well-paved, crushed-stone roads but after that the way would become increasingly rugged.

A vague breathlessness swept over Tom when he realized that he would be in Cuenca tomorrow, and that Cuenca was probably within one hundred miles of the place where his father might be found. One hundred miles—approximately half an hour by air travel, but many days as the expedition would move. Most of those miles would be through jungle country that was unexplored.

After Cuenca would come the Paute River along the

banks of which were the scattered villages of the head-hunting Jivaros—the untamed savages whose curare-tipped darts and blowguns were capable of silent, sudden death. The "Flying Death" as it was called.

Tom's brain was filled with stories he had heard about the Jivaros, their superstitions and their magic. He thought of the beads and trinkets, the fireworks and all the other things that Gulliver had purchased and wondered if these childishly simple things could win the admiration of the Indians, the respect without which the expedition would be doomed to failure.

The room was dark, and Tom was physically exhausted, but he couldn't seem to slow the activity of his brain. He needed rest. He knew that the task ahead would call for all the energy he could store up. He lay flat on his back, his eyes closed, and tried to stop thinking. He forced visions of the jungle out of his mind, but they were instantly replaced by thoughts of John Hanford. What did John Hanford know about the jungle? Why had the former engineer tried so desperately to raise money for an airport? Why had he tried to conceal the fact that Hamilton Quest still was alive? Why had he tried to destroy Tom with a bomb, and why had he entered the plane in Miami to steal the handmade map? Where would their trail and that of Hamilton Quest cross? How long—?

And then Tom heard a creak, as if someone had stepped on a loose board in the floor. It was barely perceptible above the soft noises that came through the open window. The sound would have gone unnoticed if Tom had been less alert—if his senses had not been

tuned to such a high pitch. Then there was another creak in the dark room. Slowly Tom turned his head to the door. Though he could see nothing in the blackness, he had a feeling that he was not alone. Instinctively he sensed that an intruder was in the room.

When he had turned out his light, the lights burning in the corridor had made a narrow strip of illumination beneath the door, but now that ribbon of light was gone. Had the hall lights been turned out? Was the bedroom door open or closed?

Once more a floorboard creaked softly. Neither Gulliver nor Whiz Walton would employ such stealth in entering his room. Tom could think of no one else who would have reason to come into the room. He felt a tightening of all his muscles and a prickling sensation in the short hairs on the back of his neck. Then something more tangible!

It was the light touch of a hand on his shoulder. Tom exploded into action!

Throwing back the light sheet that covered him, he leaped from the bed and grabbed for the unseen prowler. His fingers touched cloth, but the figure leaped back with a sudden, quick intake of breath. Tom lunged ahead, groping with both arms outstretched.

"What are you doing in here?" he cried. His foot caught on a scuffed-up rug. He tripped and fell forward, crashing to the floor. As he leaped to his feet, the door of the bedroom slammed.

Tom had to fumble in the darkness to find the doorknob. Precious seconds were lost. He jerked the door

wide and found that the long corridor, previously lighted, was now in total darkness.

Tom heard the sound of doors being opened violently.

Whiz Walton's voice came out of the darkness. "What's going on?"

Gulliver burst from another room holding a flashlight. The beam lanced down the corridor striking a door in the end wall, a door that slammed shut at the instant it was illuminated.

Gulliver's chief concern was Tom. He swung the light toward his young friend. "What's the matter?" he boomed, rushing up in his stocking feet. "I heard yo' yell somethin'. Are yo' all right, Tom?"

"I'm all right."

"What happened?"

"Someone sneaked into my room. I tried to catch him but he got away."

Whiz Walton cut in quickly. "There's a room at the end of this hall," he said. "I saw the door close."

"That," barked Gulliver, "is Perro's room. Come on."

The big man charged down the bare corridor like a locomotive with its headlight cutting through the gloom ahead. Tom and Whiz were close behind him.

When he reached the door, Gulliver didn't slow his stride. He didn't pause to rap or turn the knob. He hit the door with a straight-arm jab. It opened explosively with a sound of splintering wood as the latch was torn from the frame.

Perro's room was as dark as the corridor had been.

The flashlight found Perro crumpled on the floor in a far corner.

Tom rushed to his side. "Perro!" he said. "What's happened to you?"

"Git some light in here!" roared Gulliver. "Where in tarnation are the lights?"

There were several clicks as Whiz Walton tried the switch on the wall near the door. "Something's the matter with them," he said.

The flashlight swung away from Perro.

"They's a candle on the dresser. Git that goin'," ordered Gulliver. He turned the light back on the Ecuadorian.

Perro's eyes were wide and staring. He pointed to the open window and faltered, "H-he—he went out there."

"Who did?" demanded Tom.

The candle spilled dim light in the room. For the first time, Tom noticed that Gulliver was fully dressed except for shoes and necktie. Whiz Walton wore a dressing gown over his pajamas and light slippers on his feet. Tom had neither robe nor slippers. Pajama clad, he was just as he had leaped from bed. Perro wore felt slippers, but was otherwise dressed.

Gulliver was at the window beaming his light on a narrow balcony that extended across the rear of the hotel.

"Yo' say someone went out here?" he demanded.

Perro said, "Yes."

"The chances are he skipped over the railin' o' that balcony an' jumped to the ground," decided Gulliver. "It ain't far."

Tom helped Perro to his feet and guided him to a chair while Whiz Walton poured water from a pitcher that he found on a bedside table.

The small man murmured, "Gracias." He took a few swallows of water and then held his hand to his head with an expression of pain.

"What h-happened?" he asked in a thin voice.

"That," replied Gulliver, "is what we want to know. Some skulkin' prowler was coyotin' around Tom's bedroom. What happened to yo'?"

"I—I was sitting here in this chair reading a book when the lights went out. I waited for a moment and then I went to the door to see if the other lights were out or if the trouble was only in my room. I heard a shout—" He looked at Tom. "It sounded, amigo, like your voice."

"It was."

"I heard your door slam and then soft sounds like someone running toward me. It was dark. Before I could see the man he was upon me."

"He could have seen you," Tom said. "If you were in the doorway, you were outlined against the windows."

Perro said, "He struck me several times. He hit me in the stomach and in the chest. I remember falling back and there was a very short glimpse of someone going out the window. That is all I remember until I found myself on the floor."

"I don't expect there's much use lookin' around outside," growled Gulliver. "Footprints would never show on the flagstones under the balcony."

"He might be hiding near by," suggested Tom.

Gulliver shook his head. "It's too dark to go man huntin'."

Señor Lopez came down the corridor holding a candle. He joined the group in Perro's bedroom and inquired about the commotion.

Tom told what he knew about the prowler in his own bedroom and then the facts as he had just heard them from Perro.

"Where was yo'," demanded Gulliver, "when all this was goin' on?"

"When the lights went out," the hotel man said, "I went to the basement to call the man who has charge of repairs. While I was there, I heard noises like doors slamming. Then there was a sound like something breaking." Lopez glanced around the candlelit room. When he saw the broken door, he put a hand to his forehead and gave voice to an expression of woe.

"Never yo' mind that door," Gulliver said. "We got other things that's more important. We got to see if that prowler stole anythin' out o' Tom's room. An' if he did, we aim to hold this here hotel responsible." The big man turned to Perro. "Yo' stay right here in yo' room," he commanded. "Maybe I'll want to ask yo' some questions."

He took the candle from the dresser and turned toward the door.

"Wait, señor," Perro said. "That candle belongs in this room."

Gulliver frowned and replied, "Yo' don't need no light for sleepin'."

Perro began a protest that remained unfinished when the lights came on suddenly.

Gulliver blew out the candle and stuck it in his pocket saying, "I better take 'er along in case o' more trouble."

Tom led the way to his own room with the others following. He flicked a wall switch and a ceiling light responded.

The light was none too bright but for eyes that had been accustomed to candlelight it was more than sufficient to reveal all details in the room.

Apparently nothing had been disturbed. Tom's clothing, neatly hung over the back of a chair, was just as he had left it. His suitcase lay open, but he remembered opening it to take out his pajamas and the toilet articles he would need.

He pointed to a small, rumpled rug near the bed. That's what I tripped over," he said. "If it hadn't been for that, I might have caught the man who came here. I—" He stopped abruptly as his eyes fell on a gleaming object near the corner where the head of his bed met the wall.

"A knife!" he exclaimed.

It was an ivory-handled knife with a thin blade about six inches long.

Gulliver started for it, but Whiz Walton grabbed the big man's arm. "Hold it," he said, "that thing may have fingerprints on it."

"The prowler must have dropped it when I grabbed him," said Tom.

"But I got to see it!" exclaimed Gulliver. "That toad stabber looks familiar."

"Familiar or not, be careful how you handle it." The reporter whipped a handkerchief out of the pocket of his dressing gown. He dropped to his hands and knees and examined the knife at close range without touching it.

"Let's have your flashlight," he said to Gulliver. He held the light at various angles and studied the blade and ivory handle carefully.

"It looks as clean as a whistle," he muttered. "No smudges at all. There might, however, be some latent prints that can be brought out."

He spread the handkerchief on the floor next to the knife, then, using one finger, he rolled the weapon onto the handkerchief.

"If yo'd only let me look at that thing, I might be able to tell yo' who it belongs to," Gulliver said.

"Look all you want to, but don't touch it." The reporter rose to his feet carrying the knife cradled in the handkerchief.

"What makes you think you know who left it here?" he demanded.

"Put 'er there on that table an' let me study it close."

The reporter obeyed.

"Now, give me back my flashlight. Let me see if there's a small nick in the butt end o' that ivory handle."

"What will a nick mean?" asked Tom.

Gulliver's brow was beetled. His eyes were squinted in a deep frown and the corners of his mouth turned down.

"The nick," he said, "is here."

He turned his scowl on Miguel Lopez. "Could anyone git in here without bein' seen?" he demanded.

The proprietor shrugged his shoulders and threw out both hands in a "Who knows?" gesture.

"Warn't yo' downstairs near the door?"

"Not all of the time, señor. It is possible that someone may have entered the arcade when there was no one there."

"Someone got in the hotel all right," growled Gulliver. "An' he knowed just where to look for Tom Quest. He come here to run that knife into Tom an' I know who the critter is." The big man waggled his finger toward the knife.

"That knife," he said, "belongs to John Hanford."

Silence followed this announcement. Gulliver looked at Tom and then at Whiz.

"Well, don't that surprise yo'?"

"I," said the reporter, "have reached the point where nothing surprises me."

"How about yo', Tom?"

Tom said, "I thought that's what you were leading up to, Gulliver."

"The skulkin' polecat is here in Ecuador—in Guayaquil. I thought yo' told me the lawmen were goin' to be on the lookout for him."

"Mr. Perro reported him to the police. At least, that's what he told me."

"Just a minute," put in Whiz Walton. "Hanford was in jail. He certainly didn't have that knife there with him."

"O' course he didn't. There's a lot o' things he didn't have in jail with him—things that he left in Florida where he'd been livin'. We know he was in Miami.

The chances are he picked up everythin' he needed, includin' that there knife, before he left the States."

Whiz Walton nodded and said, "That's possible."

"Also," said Tom Quest, "it is unimportant. Guessing isn't going to get us anywhere."

"Tom's right," said Whiz. "We better report this thing to the police and see if they can find fingerprints on the knife."

Miguel Lopez shook his head slowly and said, "It's no use. You can do nothing until morning."

"You mean the police won't even take the report of an attempted murder!" demanded the reporter hotly.

The hotel manager smiled and said, "This, señor, is Ecuador."

Gulliver agreed, "We can't do a doggoned thing until mornin'. But then, by thunder, I aim to stir up the lawmen an' let 'em know we want some action. Yo', Whiz, take charge o' that knife."

The newspaperman nodded.

"An' yo'," Gulliver went on, jabbing a finger in the direction of Miguel Lopez, "rustle up a couple o' yo' cholo boys an' move Tom's bed."

"For what?" demanded Tom.

"Yo're movin' in with me. We ain't takin' no more chances. We'll git what sleep we can between now an' daybreak an' then I aim to find out about John Hanford."

This prophecy by Gulliver was accurate. Astounding things were to come to light at daybreak.

CHAPTER 15

The Lost Cablegram

TOM QUEST wakened with brilliant sunlight and a confusing jangle of street noises coming through the open window. He sat up in bed and looked at his watch. It was three hours after daybreak, the time set for leaving Guayaquil and starting out for Cuenca. What had happened? Had the plans been changed?

For a moment his mind was filled with a hodgepodge of bewildering thoughts—a prowler in the dark—an ivory-handled knife—and Gulliver's face distorted with rage. Then, as he became more wide awake, the events of last night fitted into their proper sequence, ending with Gulliver's insistence that Tom Quest's bed be moved.

Tom was in Gulliver's room. Gulliver's bed against the opposite wall was empty. Tom jumped out of bed. He started for the door but halted when he noticed that his clothing had been brought from the other room and placed on a chair near the washstand.

He washed quickly, then dressed without delay. Gulliver came into the room as he was putting on his necktie.

"Hi there, Tom," the big man said. "I'm glad to see yo're up at last."

"Why didn't you call me?" demanded Tom. "Do you know what time it is? I thought we were going to check out at daybreak."

"The plans are changed," Gulliver said briefly.

"But why?"

"On account o' John Hanford. That critter has made three moves against us an' two o' them was aimed at yo' personal. I don't aim to give him the chance to try again."

"But all the plans were made," objected Tom. "The cholo boys were going to report at daybreak and you had arranged for transportation to Cuenca . . ."

"I got up early an' took care of all them things. I figured there was nothin' yo' could do so yo' might as well stay asleep."

"What about Whiz Walton? Is he up?"

"Sure thing. I rolled him out early to go to the police department an' turn in Hanford's knife an' git a man hunt underway."

"Did he do it?"

"We're in Guayaquil," said Gulliver as if that explained everything.

Tom looked perplexed.

"Folks down here believe in takin' it easy. The police headquarters wasn't open."

"Where's Whiz now?"

"In his room. He's been writin' up a lot of stuff to

send to his paper in New York." Gulliver hauled out his big timepiece and studied it. "Got to stall around a little longer before we can git into the police headquarters." He scratched his chin for a moment.

"Maybe," he muttered, "it'd be a good idea if I went along with Whiz."

"For what?" asked Tom.

"I don't want them critters dillydallyin' around an' wastin' time when they start huntin' Hanford. I want action." He pulled a key from the pocket of his jacket, unlocked the medicine chest and threw back the lid. After fumbling around for a moment, he brought out his well-worn gun belt and his favorite six-gun.

"I'm agoin' to be loaded for big game when I call on them gendarmes. I'll let 'em know that they'd better find John Hanford pronto or I'll go man huntin' on my own, that's what I'll do."

He punctuated his remark by slamming the lid of the chest.

"Hey, Gulliver," called Whiz from the corridor. "Are you in there?"

"Come on in."

The reporter stepped into the room. "Oh," he said to Tom, "you're up, eh?"

Tom said, "What's the program?"

"The café is open. We might as well have breakfast. By the time we're finished, police headquarters will be open. Then we can report last night's incident."

The newspaperman saw Gulliver strapping on his gun belt.

"Whom," he said, "do you expect to meet?"

"When yo' call on the law, I aim to go along," Gulliver said evenly.

"But that—" said Whiz, pointing to the gun. "Do you think you'll have to defend yourself?"

"I aim to locate Hanford. If I figure the law is goin' to give us any sort o' run-around, I'll set out on his trail myself."

Whiz pursed his lips for a moment considering Gulliver's plans. Then he said, "Let's go to breakfast."

"Now," said Tom, "you're talking. I'm starved."

Gulliver made short work of breakfast. He wolfed his food with many complaints about the lack of seasoning. He had a peculiar knack that fascinated Whiz Walton. He was able, it seemed, to masticate prodigious amounts of food at one time and talk while he was doing so.

"Pulin' grub," he muttered. "Got no authority at all." He pointed with his fork to a fluffy mound of omelette. "Blowed up like puffballs," he grumbled. "Look at 'er. It fills the whole doggoned plate, but there's nothin' to it. If that there stuff was mashed down solid, it wouldn't amount to more than a mouthful."

"A mouthful for you," observed Whiz, "is a pretty good meal for anyone else."

Gulliver cleaned his plate and swallowed his cup of coffee in a single gulp. Tom and Whiz had but half finished when he pushed his chair back from the table and raised his head to look around the room.

Miguel Lopez came through an arch from the arcade and walked directly to the table where the three were eating. He smiled a greeting and apologized profusely

for the disturbance of the night before as he sat down at the table.

"I thought," he said, "you would be interested in knowing what was wrong with the electric lights."

"We know what was wrong with 'em," Gulliver said. "They was out."

Miguel said, "There was a short circuit. It caused a fuse to blow out."

"Where was the short circuit?" asked Whiz Walton.

"Who knows?" Lopez shrugged his shoulders.

"You mean you didn't find it?"

"No, but it does not matter. When the fuse was replaced, the lights were quite all right as if nothing had happened."

"If the short circuit had been an accident," Tom said, "it would probably have stayed that way. I think—" He paused.

The others looked at him questioningly.

"I think John Hanford got into the hotel and shorted the wires so the lights would go out. That made it a lot easier for him to get away without being seen."

"We're going to report last night's affair to the police as soon as the headquarters are open," the reporter explained. "They'll probably send some men over here to look around."

Miguel nodded. "Whatever you wish," he said. "I will do all I can to co-operate."

"By the way," the newspaperman reached into an inside pocket and brought out a sheaf of yellow paper covered with longhand writing, "I'd like to send this copy

to my paper in New York. Where's the nearest cable office?"

"It is but half a block south of here on the same street."

"I suppose we'll have to wait for that to open, too."

"Oh, no, señor. The cable office opens early in the morning." Lopez laughed slightly. "You must have forgotten. You have already received a message from there."

Whiz looked up sharply. "I what?"

"The cable that was delivered to you this morning—"

"What cable?" Whiz cut in. "I didn't receive any message."

Anxiety showed in the face of Lopez. "Señor, you say you did not receive the message?"

"That's what I said. Where did it come from?"

"It was relayed from Salinas. I think it came from the States."

"Then why didn't I get it?" Whiz demanded hotly. "Where is it? What did you do with it?"

"Amigo, please forgive me. I am not a young man. The stairs are long—"

"Never mind the stairs. Where's the cable?"

"Señor Perro had gone out for an early morning walk. He came in and he was near my desk when the cable was delivered—"

"Perro!" rasped Gulliver. "What's he got to do with it?"

"He offered to deliver the message. He said he would rap lightly on the door and if there was no response, he would slide it beneath the door." Hopefully Lopez added, "It may be there now."

"It is not there now," Whiz stated flatly. "I just came from my room."

Gulliver was on his feet "Come on," he said to the others.

"Where?" asked Tom.

"We'll call on Perro!"

Whiz gulped the last of his coffee standing and hurried from the café with Gulliver and Tom while Miguel Lopez threw out his hands in a gesture of futility and murmured, "These Yanquis. They are always in a hurry."

The door to Alonzo Perro's room at the end of the long corridor was closed. But as far as Gulliver was concerned, there might just as well have been no door at all. He hit it as he had the night before and the temporary lock proved no more resitant than the previous one had been. The door opened with a rending sound and swung back to hit the wall with a "Bam!" that carried through the corridor, down the stairs, across the arcade and into the café to bring a wince of despair from Miguel Lopez.

Perro was not in the bedroom. Neither was his suitcase. Tom crossed to the closet, opened the door and found the closet bare. Whiz Walton found a chest of drawers equally empty. The bed was rumpled and the towels on a small rack were damp.

"He spent the night here," Tom decided.

"But it looks as if he's cleared out."

"Gone," echoed Gulliver as he grabbed the wastebasket and emptied the contents on the bed. "See if that there telegram is in here."

Whiz Walton went through the crumpled papers hurriedly. There were a few old envelopes, a day-old newspaper, several small sheets of wrapping paper that probably had held recent purchases and that was all.

"I wonder," Tom said, looking at Whiz, "if your message had anything to do with his sudden disappearance."

"We'll know when we find out what was in that message. There should be a copy of it at the office."

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's go there."

Ten minutes later, a girl came from a small rear room at the telegraph office carrying a sheet of paper.

Whiz Walton grabbed it eagerly. He scanned it and gave a low, exclamatory whistle.

"What's it say?" asked Tom.

"Read it out loud," said Gulliver.

"You remember," began the reporter, "that friend of mine who told me about John Hanford's escape from jail, don't you?"

"Yes."

"This message is from him."

"Is it about John Hanford?"

"Yeah. And you two had better get hold of something and hang on because this will jar you.

"*John Hanford has been found!*"

CHAPTER 16

John Hanford's Accomplice

John Hanford has been found!"

Whiz Walton's startling announcement brought a flurry of overlapping questions from Tom Quest and Gulliver.

"Where?"

"When?"

"Who found him?"

The reporter shoved the cablegram toward Tom. "Here," he said. "Read it for yourself." He turned to the girl attendant. "I've got to call the States right away. Where can I find a telephone?"

The wide-eyed señorita turned toward the office in the rear. "Señor—" she began.

"Never mind, I see it." Whiz scooted to the inner office and closed the door behind him leaving Tom and Gulliver to read the balance of the message.

"What's it say, Tom?"

" 'John Hanford located in farmhouse a half mile from abandoned car. Wound infected. Condition critical.' "

"Is that all it says?"

"Yes," said Tom. "The abandoned car must have been the one that was used for the getaway."

"Don't it say when he was found?"

"No. But if he was found near the car, he couldn't have been far from the prison and, Gulliver, that means that he wasn't in New York at all."

"If he warn't in New York, how did he rig up that bomb?"

Ignoring the question, Tom said, "He couldn't have been in Miami either, and he certainly couldn't have been here in Quayaquil last night."

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Gulliver. "Tom, this here puts a new light on everythin'."

Tom's voice was excited. "It certainly does," he said. "If Hanford wasn't in Miami, Alonzo Perro lied about seeing him."

"Sure he lied."

"Holy mackerel, Gulliver, I'll bet he has been lying about everything."

Tom's mind whirled back over events since Alonzo Perro entered his New York hotel room.

"He must have lied about the men who came to his room looking for me. He must have lied about being in danger—the bomb—the way it was set—the stolen map—"

"Now hold on, Tom. Take it easy. Just a minute. One thing at a time."

"It all fits in, Gulliver. It's been Perro from the start. Even the fingerprints!"

"What fingerprints?"

"Don't you remember? The police found fingerprints on the car that met Hanford when he made his break. The car that was abandoned—the stolen car. They were small fingerprints. The police thought the accomplice might have been a woman."

"That's it!" exploded Gulliver, smacking his fist against the palm of his hand. "Doggone, Tom, that *is* it. Perro's hands are as small as any girl's I ever saw. The fingerprints on that there car was his an' there ain't no two ways about it."

The big man frowned darkly. "I—" He stopped abruptly and frowned. "It don't jell," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Accordin' to yo' reasonin', Perro's been doin' things an' puttin' the blame on Hanford."

"Of course he has."

"That bein' the case, it would have been Perro who sent the bomb an' that don't make sense."

"Why not?"

"Because it was Perro that saved us from bein' blown to smithereens by that there bomb."

"Sure he did, Gulliver. That's how he won our confidence. He timed it just right. He called on us with a trumped-up story and he was there when the bomb was delivered. He made us think he saved our lives so we'd feel grateful enough to take him with us. That's why the bomb was rigged up the way it was."

"How's that?"

"We thought it was strange that it would be set to explode when it was opened and at the same time have a clock to set it off if it wasn't opened. He had to have the clock in there so he could hear the ticking and have reason to suspect it was a bomb."

Gulliver's furrowed brow smoothed out. "Doggone, Tom, yo're talkin' sense. Good sense. But there's a lot o' things that still call for an accountin'."

"For example?"

"John Hanford's letterin' on that package."

"Perro might have had a sample of his writing."

Gulliver nodded. "I suppose he could o' had."

"You said that ivory-handled knife belonged to Hanford."

"An' so it did."

"We know John Hanford didn't leave it in my bedroom last night. If Perro's the one who left it there, he must have had it in his possession. If he had the knife, he probably had a lot of other things, including samples of John Hanford's printing."

Gulliver grinned at Tom. "Son," he said, "yo're just like yo' pa. That brain o' yo's is clickin' one hundred per cent. And what's more, yo're thinkin' straight. Yo're downright logical. There ain't no doubt about who left that knife in yo' bedroom. Perro's the one. He high-tailed to his own room an' when he heard us acomin', he dropped to the corner an' acted like he'd been mauled. Then he handed us a string o' lies about someone goin' out his window. It all fits like a broke-in saddle."

"Sure it does," Tom said enthusiastically. "Every detail fits. When Perro got his hands on the cablegram for

Whiz, he opened it and read it. When he learned that Hanford had been found, he decided it was his move—so he cleared out in a hurry."

"Yeah, an' the thing is, Tom, where did he clear out to? I been piecin' a few things together on my own hook, an' I got ahold o' somethin'. It must o' been Perro himself that snagged that map when the plane was in Miami. With that map, he knows where we're agoin'. We're agoin' to have to be on the watch for him."

For a moment Tom didn't speak. Then he said softly, "I wonder if he intended to sink that knife in me last night. Maybe he was just trying to frighten us. But I don't think that was the case. I think he intended to kill me."

Tom looked at Gulliver and added, "But why? That's what I don't understand."

Gulliver said, "He's linked up with Hanford in some way. There's somethin' down here in Ecuador that those two are tryin' to promote an' they don't want us to learn anythin' about it."

"I wonder what it could be."

Gulliver scratched his chin and pondered for a moment. "Now here," he said, "is how I doped it out. Perro tried to git Hanford out o' the pokey so's the two o' them could work against us. But Hanford stopped lead and Perro had to come on alone.

"I knowed they was somethin' wrong about Perro. I knowed it from the start, Tom. A couple o' times I caught a look in his eye. He was tryin' hard to act like he was friendly but every so often I'd catch a look that was just like the eyes of a jackass I used to own. That critter

acted like I was his best friend, an' then one day when I warn't lookin' for trouble, he let me have it with both heels an' made complete ruination out o' my Sunday pants. I wish I had Perro here now. I wish I had him an' that jar o' brandin' salve he got on his hand. Doggone, I'd rub the whole jarful in his hair."

Gulliver turned quickly as if seized by a sudden inspiration. "Tom," he said sharply, "I got things to do. Yo' wait right here for Whiz Walton an' mind yo' don't leave here without him."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm goin' to that there police headquarters an' tell 'em to throw out a dragnet for Alonzo Perro."

Tom glanced at his watch. "It's still a little early," he said.

But Gulliver was on his way. At the door he turned and shouted, "If it ain't open for business yet, I'll open it."

The door slammed and he was gone.

Whiz Walton had good luck in placing his call to the States. The connections were made with a minimum of delay and he came from the inner office beaming.

"While I was waiting for the connection," he said, "I did some thinking and got a lot of right answers."

"Gulliver and I talked things over," Tom said, "and there's just one answer to everything."

"Perro?" asked the reporter.

"Perro," replied Tom Quest.

"While I was talking to my friend," Whiz said, "I gave him the address of that place where Perro was staying in New York. I told him if the police would look around,

they might find fingerprints to match the ones of Hanford's accomplice in the escape."

"Gulliver went to the police to tell them to look for Perro. Did you get any further information on Hanford?"

"Yes," Whiz replied. "He was found yesterday afternoon. Some farm kids were prowling around an old deserted farmhouse. They heard groans and got scared. When they told their folks about it, there was an investigation. Hanford was found delirious with fever from an infected gun wound. He was on a pile of blankets in a corner with a stock of food and water where he could reach it.

"He's back in jail now, in the hospital. He's unconscious. They don't know whether he'll pull through or not. They haven't been able to get any information from him. I'll bet all the tea in China that Perro's the baby the police are looking for."

"The police in Ecuador are going to be looking for him too," Tom replied, "or Gulliver will tear the place apart."

CHAPTER 17

The Last Outpost

In the office of the chief of police, Gulliver expressed himself in Spanish that was peppered with Jivaro expressions and English salted with picturesque similes that were characteristic of the cowboy country.

The chief of police understood only part of what the big man said, but Gulliver's gestures were unmistakable. To punctuate, he frequently brought his fist down on the desktop in a manner that jarred the whole room. His booming voice carried through the entire building. Uniformed men scurried to the office of their leader and remained to stare and gape at Gulliver.

He talked for fifteen minutes, and when he had finished, the chief snapped sharp commands that sent his men out on the run. He promised Gulliver that everything possible would be done to locate Alonzo Perro.

With this assurance, Gulliver strode from the building.

He met Tom Quest and the newspaper columnist just outside the door.

"I got them lawmen on the job," he said. "Now we got no more time to calf around here in Guayaquil. Yo' two mosey over to the hotel an' git things packed. I'll corral Manga an' his cholo boys an' find the critter that's to provide transportation to Cuenca."

"Then we're starting right away?" Tom asked eagerly.

"We are."

"But," objected Whiz, "I'm expecting another message from the States after they check on Perro's fingerprints."

"Leave word for it to be forwarded to Cuenca."

The reporter pulled his yellow sheets of copy from his pocket and waved them at Gulliver. "I've got to get this on the wire," he said. "It's news. My paper will—"

"Yo' never mind that stuff. We're agoin' to make some news that'll put that in the shade. Now stir yo' stumps an' do what I said."

By noon, four buses were loaded with men and equipment and the expedition was ready to get under way. Gulliver scanned the inventory lists and checked the number on each case. He handed the lists to Whiz, then climbed into the seat beside the driver of the leading bus.

"Let 'er rip," he cried. "Git 'er goin' an' don't yo' stop this side o' Cuenca. There's goin' to be no siesta for yo' critters today."

Miguel Lopez, standing in the entrance of the Grand Hotel, waved good-bye, then mopped his face with a handkerchief and returned to his desk with a deep sigh of relief. For him it had been a trying morning.

At Cuenca, the buses were unloaded and dismissed at the edge of the city. A temporary camp was established. Tom and Whiz Walton stayed to keep an eye on the equipment and the cholo boys while Gulliver and Manga went into town. Manga was to hire additional men to assist in carrying the packs. Gulliver didn't explain his errand.

Manga returned in about an hour bringing with him eight Jivaros to complete his crew. He delegated certain men to carry cases—others to serve as machete men and still others, including one whose head was bandaged, who would be taken along as replacements.

Tom Quest and Whiz were impressed by the business-like way in which the Jivaro Indian went about his task. Manga saw that each case was assigned to a cholo boy, and then appointed subcuracas whose duty it was to keep an eye on every porter to see that none of them dumped his load in the bush along the trail to pursue a toucan or some other bird or beast.

A number of the new recruits carried nine-foot blowguns made of metal-hard chonta wood with a mouthpiece which, Manga explained, came from the shinbone of tapirs or jaguars. They also carried ten-inch arrows in quivers made of bamboo. The arrows were slightly thicker than a pencil lead.

Manga showed these to Tom and Whiz Walton and demonstrated their use. Before being used, the pointed end of the arrow was dipped in a small gourd of tarlike stuff. Tom felt a shudder when he examined the poisonous curare.

While waiting for Gulliver to return, some of the cholo boys exhibited their uncanny accuracy with blowguns, firing darts—unpoisoned ones—at a target a hundred feet away.

The natives were almost childlike in their love of fun and curiosity. Tom and Whiz were delighted with their easy laughter and passed out hard peppermint lozenges, the only candy which will not go to pieces in the damp jungle. The Indians called it jambi.

"They seem to call everything jambi," observed Whiz. "They spoke of their curare as jambi."

Tom said, "Jambi is medicine or poison. Good or bad. It's also witchcraft and black magic. I'm just wondering how Gulliver's jambi is going to go over."

"You mean his fireworks?"

"Fireworks, phonograph records, fancy beads—"

Whiz shook his head slowly. "That's one part of the program I'm not in favor of."

"What's that, Whiz?"

"Gulliver's planning to try to outdo Jatun-Jatun Curaca."

The reporter's voice was low. When he spoke, he hadn't thought any of the Jivaros were listening, but mention of the great, big chief brought an instant reaction from those who were nearest. They sobered at once and several wore a look of fear.

After Manga had reassured them in swift guttural words they went on with what they had been doing, but their playful spirits seemed to have been dampened.

"You see what I mean," said Whiz. "These boys are

scared to death at the mere mention of old J. J. C. How do you think they're going to act if Gulliver tries to stage some sort of competition?"

"Gosh, I don't know."

"What are you looking at, Tom?"

The reporter noticed that Tom's attention was concentrated on the Indian whose head was swathed in a dirty-looking bandage that came low over his forehead and slanted over one eye. He sat cross-legged on the ground with his bowed head resting on his hands.

"That Indian named Paco," Tom said. "I wonder what's the matter with him."

"We'll find out." The reporter signaled for Manga who approached and saluted. "What's the matter with Paco?"

"He is unwell."

"Then what's he doing with us?"

"He all right again soon," Manga said in his jerky, stilted style. He explained that he had encountered considerable difficulty in finding a sufficient number of men. In fact, a half dozen additional cholo boys could very well be used on the trip.

"There will," he told Tom and Whiz, "be some who will desert before many days."

He gave his personal assurance that Paco's illness was of a temporary nature.

Tom knew that the Indians were utterly lacking in dependability. They were incredibly timid in their acceptance of anything that was new or different and if they disapproved of anything that transpired while they were contracted to serve as porters they simply slipped off si-

lently to disappear in the denseness of the jungle. He didn't want an argument with Manga.

"All right," he said. "Let it go at that."

"I don't like the idea of having a sick man in our party," Whiz Walton whispered as Manga walked away.

"Neither do I, Whiz, but there's no other way. Gulliver told me a lot about these boys. You can't change the Indians. Unless we want all kinds of trouble, we have to give way to them from time to time."

Whiz said dryly, "Like Gulliver when he discussed their pay."

"Oh, that's different. They like to haggle over prices. That's part of their fun. Gulliver understands these fellows. If he wants to get rid of the sick one, he'll find some way to do it."

"Speaking of Gulliver," the reporter said, looking over Tom's shoulder, "here he comes."

Tom would have known it even if Whiz Walton hadn't spoken. A bloodcurdling cry of "Ya-hoo-o-o-o-ooo" rang out in a rising and falling falsetto.

Gulliver approached with long, purposeful strides. His face was sweaty, but he wore a pleased expression. He handed a cablegram to Whiz Walton.

"Here," he said, "is a reply to that message yo' sent to the States. It was forwarded from Guayaquil. I picked it up in the office at Cuenca."

"And opened it," added Whiz.

"Sure, I opened it."

"It's addressed to me."

"I had to open it to find out what was in it. The law

checked up on Perro's fingerprints like yo' told 'em to."

"What did they find?" asked Tom.

It was Whiz who answered. "Perro," he said, "is the man."

"Just as we figured. Yes, siree," Gulliver said heartily, "Perro's the double-dealin', triple-twisted polecat that helped John Hanford make his getaway. It's his fingerprints that was on the car. Now wait till yo' hear what else I got to say.

"I went into town to talk to two-three hombres that I know."

"For what?"

Gulliver reached into his pocket and pulled out a copy of the photograph showing John Hanford and the Indians. He pointed to the Jivaro who wore the spiral brooch around his neck—the brooch that had belonged to Tom Quest's mother.

"I asked my friends where I could find this Injun," he said.

"Did they know?"

"No, but they put me in line o' somethin'."

Tom held his breath.

"I was told to look up that brujo that Manga spoke of. The witch doctor that's called Jatun-Jatun Curaca. If we can make friends with him, he'll tell us where to find the Injun."

Tom's voice was tense. "Will he know?"

"If he don't, he can find out."

"The problem," said Whiz Walton, "is to find J. J. C." He gestured toward the east. "There's an awful lot of jungle."

Gulliver fished through several pockets before he found a folded paper. Spreading it out, he showed his friends a crude map, marked with a dotted line and compass directions.

"This map," he said, "will help. It'll take us close to the big brujo's village." He paused and squinted at the pencil marking. "Just one trouble," he muttered.

"Just one?"

"Where we got to go is in the thickest, worst part o' the whole blamed head-hunter country."

"I knew it."

"White men have never got close to that part o' the jungle an' Injuns, aside from them that are in the brujo's own village, are scared to go near the place."

Tom's hopes had been inflated. Gulliver's remark sent them down to his shoes.

"Then how," he said with a little sigh, "can we go there?"

"We can't do it without Manga and the cholo boys, can we?" asked Whiz.

Gulliver shook his head.

"They'll probably desert us long before we get near the place," the reporter said.

"They'll want to," Gulliver agreed. "They're plenty scared o' Jatun-Jatun Curaca. He's made a mighty big name for himself with his brujería, but leave them cholo boys to me. I'll handle 'em."

"What are you going to do?"

"When they git notions o' desertin' us, I'm goin' to show 'em some o' my jambi. I'll scare the livin' daylights out o' them. Maybe they'll be afraid to go on with us, but

I'll make 'em more afraid o' doin' otherwise!" Gulliver grinned. "I got some persuadin' ways," he finished.

"You might use some of your persuading ways on Manga," suggested Tom. "He's signed up an invalid to go along."

"A what?"

Tom pointed to the bandaged and ailing Indian who sat apart from the others. "His name is Paco."

"What's the matter with him? Did someone crease his skull?"

"I don't know."

Gulliver gave his belt a hitch and said, "I'll have a talk with him."

CHAPTER 18

The Trail Grows Narrow

Gulliver tried to talk to Paco in English, then in Spanish and finally made an effort to express himself with his limited knowledge of Jivaro. But the response was unsatisfactory. Paco made meaningless guttural sounds interspersed with mournful wails and all the while he held his head and remained squatting on the ground.

Manga joined the big man and explained that Paco was unable to speak.

"Then why in thunder did yo' bring him along an' what's ailin' him?"

The leader of the Indians told about the shortage of help. Paco, he said, had been recommended. The illness was of a temporary nature and would soon pass. He further explained that Paco by means of signs had made it known that he had met some enemies in Cuenca. Those

enemies had administered a severe beating and the injured man had pleaded desperately for a chance to accompany the expedition in the hope of avoiding another meeting with his assailants.

Gulliver was sympathetic. He threw up his hands and said, "All right, we'll take him along, but if we got to take him, we got to cure him."

He squatted before one of the packs that held boxes and bottles from his medicine chest and pawed through the contents until he found a container filled with pale, oily liquid.

"Doggone," he said, "the label has slipped off o' this here thing. It's this damp climate."

"The labels don't mean much," observed Whiz Walton, thinking of the branding salve that Perro had used in place of unguent.

"This here's the stuff I need. I recognize it." Gulliver handed the bottle to Manga. "This," he said, "is jambi. Good jambi. Yo' make Paco over there take a good stiff swig."

"Jambi?" repeated the Indian.

"Yeah, it'll drive away the evil spirits that are kickin' around in yo' friend's innards an' makin' him unhappy."

Manga nodded and took the bottle. He headed for Paco.

"What did you give him?" asked Tom.

"Just castor oil. No matter what's ailin' him, it'll help. As soon as that's took care o' we'll git under way."

While waiting for Manga to return with the bottle, Gulliver reached into the pack and felt around.

"That label," he said, "must be in here somewhere. If I can find 'er, I'll stick 'er back on the bottle."

"I don't know why you don't get a set of medicines labeled in the usual way, instead of all that old junk with numbers," the reporter said.

"This outfit suits me," was the simple reply. "I got the label." He brought up a small square of paper and looked at it. A curious expression crossed his battered face as he read, "92."

Turning toward Manga and the Indian who was ill, he muttered, "Gosh! I wonder?"

Paco had no chance to resist. Manga held the bandaged head in one hand and the bottle in the other. He forced it into Paco's mouth and tilted. The ailing Indian took one deep gulp and then reacted violently. He leaped to his feet, coughing and choking and spitting on the ground. His lethargy was gone. His arms flailed wildly. He jumped up and down and let out yips and gasps.

Gulliver was grinning as Manga returned the half empty bottle.

"Jambi," the Indian said soberly, "plenty good."

"Is yo' friend fixed up?"

Manga nodded. "Better now," he said.

Gulliver licked the label and slapped it on the bottle. He turned to Tom and winked.

"Yo' know, Tom," he said, "that stuff done the trick as good as castor oil."

"It wasn't castor oil?"

"It looked the same, but it warn't."

"What was it?"

"Nitro solvent," Gulliver said. "It's the stuff we use to clean out the bar'ls of our shootin' irons."

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Whiz Walton. "Why don't you label your stuff?"

"What's wrong with my labels?"

The reporter groaned and shook his head.

No one knew whether or not Paco was cured by the medicine. He might have been acting to forestall another dose, but if so, it was a good act. He showed no further sign of illness. The incident had a surprising effect on the rest of the cholo boys. They were impressed by Gulliver's jambi and looked at the big man with awe.

Before setting out on the trek, Gulliver provided Tom and Whiz with rifles, side arms, compasses and knapsacks that held emergency equipment.

"I'm hopin'," the big man said, "neither one o' yo' will have to open them knapsacks, but yo' better wear 'em all the time an' use 'em for pillows at night. We're goin' into country where yo' never know what may happen. If one o' yo' gits lost—which same I hope don't happen—yo'll find emergency rations, sulfa pills an' other things that'll be handy in there. I've also put in some fancy beads an' other junk that yo' can use as presents for the Injuns."

The three packs which Gulliver had marked for special attention were carried by the strongest of the porters. Two of these held the contents of his medicine chest, an extra gun and ammunition and some of the fireworks he had purchased from Peewee Cellini in New York. The third held the rest of Gulliver's jambi—the small phono-

graph and records—the Very pistol with its special shells; also the beads and tinsel and the rest of the trading goods.

The first few days of travel were over comparatively easy country. There were wide trails through the jungle growth and the ground was dry and firm. There was no need for the machete men. They stayed back while Manga took the lead, following the map that Gulliver had shown him.

Paco proved to be an asset. Gulliver's jambi had effected a complete recovery, though he still wore his broad, foul-looking bandage. Smaller than the other Indians, he carried no pack. He was one of the reserve bearers, to become a porter only in the event of a desertion, but he made himself useful when the "one-moon" camps were made.

The reference to "one-moon" was a daily routine that amused Tom. Each evening at sundown when Gulliver gave the word to halt, and make camp, Manga would salute and say, "How many moon we stay?"

Tom learned that Indian guides always asked the length of time you expected to use a camp. A "six-moon" camp generally implied a semipermanent shelter. Longer periods were designated as "two-rain-season" or "four-rain-season." A "four-rain-season" called for a structure as permanent as the Jivaro Indians could build.

Paco was a bundle of energy when making camp. He seemed particularly eager to please the white men, going to no end of trouble to cut soft boughs with which to pad their blankets and to make sure that their cooking fires were just right. Though his head injury seemed to

cause him no discomfort, he kept the dirty bandage in place. His inability to speak proved to be no handicap in his efforts to serve his employers.

Gulliver was well pleased with him. "If he could only talk," he said, "he'd be just as handy as Manga."

"He's probably trying to show his gratitude," Tom suggested. "After all, it was your jambi that made him well."

"He's lucky," scoffed Whiz, "that Gulliver's jambi didn't kill him."

Soon after the start of the seventh day of travel, Gulliver called Tom and Whiz to his side.

"We must be across the boundary and in Peru by now," said Tom.

"Manga says we're goin' to reach an Injun village in a couple of hours. I better tell yo' two a few things before we git there. The chances are we'll be treated friendly, an' we don't want to give no offense."

Gulliver finished with one of his characteristic masterpieces of understatement. "No, siree," he said, "we don't want to give no offense. It don't pay."

He told about the characteristics and the customs of the jungle people. "Yo' got to observe their customs if yo' aim to git along with 'em. If they offer any food, yo' eat it whether yo' like it or not. It's a prime insult to turn down anythin' that's offered. If yo' see any shrunk-up heads a-danglin' from the ceilin' o' the huts, don't make no comment on 'em. Them heads come from enemies.

"Injuns are downright superstitious about everythin'. Don't belittle none o' them superstitions an' don't make no promises yo' can't keep. If yo' see any o' the people in the village freezin' up an' standin' quiet, yo'll know yo'

done the wrong thing. When them critters freeze, they go quiet an' still in a way that would make a wooden cigar-store Injun seem temperamental. We don't want to make no enemies, so watch yo' step."

"What," asked Whiz, "do they do when they take a dislike to you? Bring out the blowguns or swing a machete?"

"They never attack out in the open," Gulliver explained. "The Injuns always nail their enemies from ambush or tag 'em while they're asleep. If they got a grudge against yo', yo' don't wake up, but yo' stop snorin'. If they take yo' scalp, they take it from the neck up."

Before reaching the Indian village, Gulliver had impressed upon his friends the importance of observing every well-established ritual.

They announced their arrival in loud voices as they approached the group of thatched huts around the edge of a clearing. Gulliver's cry was one those Jivaros would never forget.

The Indians made their visitors quite welcome. They chatted amiably with Tom, Whiz and Gulliver through Manga, who served as interpreter.

They prepared a meal which was surprisingly good and accepted gifts of beads and lengths of brilliant cloth.

It was midafternoon when Tom Quest and his friends left the village with a new slant on the jungle savages.

"They were all right," said Whiz Walton in a pleased voice.

"Sure they're all right," Gulliver replied. "They're just as much all right down here as yo' are in New York. What's more," he said, "I bet they treated us a darned

sight better'n they'd git treated if they was to march into one o' them New York hotels."

"You've got something there, Gulliver," said Whiz.

The trail narrowed and from that point on it was single file.

"Now," Gulliver said, "it's goin' to be tougher goin'. We're headin' for the lower country."

The ground was soggy underfoot. Small streams crossing the trail were wider and more frequent. There were places where wide waterways, peopled with man-eating alligators, meandered close to the narrow path.

Manga stopped on top of a small rise. Though it was earlier than the usual hour for camping, he suggested that it might be wise to halt at the favorable campsite.

Whiz Walton heaved a sigh of relief and flopped to the ground. "That," he said, "is the most brilliant suggestion I've heard in a long time. I'm all in."

Tom sat down beside the reporter. He, too, was tired, but his eagerness to learn about his father would have sustained him indefinitely.

Gulliver pulled out a blue bandanna handkerchief and mopped his face.

"Whiz," he said, "I got to hand it to yo'."

Whiz looked up suspiciously. Compliments from Gulliver were rare indeed.

"I mean it. For a man that's done no hikin' to speak of, yo' sure have kept up a solid pace."

"What did you expect me to do?" demanded the newspaperman. "Sit back on the trail alone and wait for a couple of head-hunters to cure my insomnia?"

"I figured we'd have to take 'er sort o' easy on yo' account, but we ain't done so. Fact is, I've set a pace that would make most any man call quits." He looked at Tom. "I thought Tom could keep it up, but I sure didn't expect it from yo'."

"How much ground have we covered?" asked Tom.

"I can't say how far it is in miles, but I'll tell yo' this much. We traveled just about twice as fast as Manga generally moves when he's got a party."

"How soon do you think we'll get to that village where the witch doctor lives?"

"That's hard to say." Gulliver studied the crude map. "In distance we're about halfway but that don't mean nothin'."

"Why not?" demanded the reporter.

"Because up to this point we've had easy goin'. From now on, things are goin' to be different. We may have to sidetrack to git around swampland. There'll be places where we won't git through at all until some o' the cholo boys have gone ahead an' cut a trail with their machetes. I've seen places in this here jungle where a half a mile a day was all a man could cover an' them places warn't as wild as where we're pointin'."

"Then it may take us weeks," Tom said.

"I," replied Gulliver, "don't know an' neither does Manga. We're travelin' by compass an' not by a trail. The way ahead might be better'n I think, but I'm lookin' for the worst."

"Do you think there's any chance that we won't get through at all?"

"Tom," said Gulliver, "I've been rompin' around for a good many years an' I never yet seen the place where I couldn't git through somehow."

"That I can believe," murmured Whiz in a tired voice.

Manga stood before Gulliver saluting.

"How many moon camp we make?" he asked.

"One-moon. Same as usual."

The Indians had gained efficiency in the days since the trip had begun. In a short time they had the camp ready and the fires burning. Darkness came suddenly, but when it came, it found three tired white men and a number of equally exhausted Indians bedded down for the night.

Tom Quest didn't go to sleep at once. His mind was filled with thoughts of his father. He was nearer than ever to the village of Jatun-Jatun Curaca. If things went as he hoped, the old brujo would direct him to the Indian of the photograph . . . the Indian who wore the brooch. If things went as he hoped, he would soon be looking at his mother's brooch. Would that Indian know anything about his father? That was the question.

As drowsiness settled over Tom, he seemed to see the brooch as a gleaming, golden spiral aginst the blackness of the jungle. It sparkled and glistened, and then it dissolved into a question mark that gradually faded into nothingness.

Tom Quest slept. So did Whiz and Gulliver, but the same could not be said for all the members of the expedition. There were those who waited until the hour was late before they rose to their feet and moved like shadows toward the sleeping white men.

CHAPTER 19

Missing Men

TOM KNEW as soon as he wakened that something was wrong. His first awareness came before he opened his eyes when he heard Gulliver's voice, edged with anger, in an argument with Manga. He sat up quickly and saw Whiz Walton at his side with a look of concern on his face.

"What happened?" he asked.

"It's trouble, Tom. And I have a hunch it's just the beginning."

"What kind of trouble? What's Gulliver storming about?"

The reporter pointed to the knapsack that Tom had used for a pillow. It was much flatter than it had been and the flap was open.

"Get a load of that," he said. "And look at mine. It's in the same depleted condition. Likewise Gulliver's. Some of the porters took it on the lam."

"They left us?"

"Flat. Not only that, but they helped themselves to what they wanted."

Tom picked up his knapsack—the one that had been carried against an emergency and spilled out the few things that remained.

"Those Jivaros are slick," Whiz Walton said. "They sneaked up while we were sleeping, opened our knapsacks and took out what they wanted without disturbing any of us."

"I didn't even know what was in here," Tom said. "Gulliver packed them for an emergency."

The articles on hand included small tins of concentrated foods similar to the emergency rations used by the Army. Also, there were matches in a waterproof case, a box containing grenades for sending out smoke signals of distress, another box of first-aid equipment including sulfa drugs and penicillin, with instructions for their use.

There was a small, compact sewing kit holding thread and needles, and a horseshoe magnet of the type that children buy as toys.

"What in the world is the magnet for?" Tom asked.

"I guess the Jivaros overlooked that. Gulliver had a lot of junk in the bags—beads and toys and stuff like that to be used as trading goods."

"Is that what the Indians stole?"

"Yeah."

"Then the loss doesn't amount to very much."

"Oh, the loss isn't critical, Tom. We've got plenty of things left. The important thing is that the Indians got away with it. And we were supposed to have guards

posted. Gulliver's letting Manga have both barrels."

Tom looked toward the Jivaro leader, who was talking excitedly and waving his arms in an effort to explain a situation that embarrassed him.

Gulliver cut off the explanation with a few words and joined Tom and Whiz.

"A fine thing," he howled in rage. "Them critters stole our things right from beneath our heads!"

"What did Manga have to say about it?" Tom asked.

"He claims he left some boys on guard an' blames me for the fact that they fell asleep."

"Blames you!"

"Yeah. He says I've been travelin' so fast I wore 'em out. But that's no excuse. By thunder, from now on, things are goin' to be different. I let Manga know that if there was any more stealin' or desertin', I'd make jambi that would scare them Injuns out o' ten years' growth."

"How many of the men deserted?" It was Tom who asked the question.

"Five, but we can git by without 'em. I figured on a couple o' desertions an' brought spares along on that account. While breakfast is bein' fixed up, I'll restock yo' emergency kits."

Manga was issuing a few commands that brought the porters together. It was almost laughable the way his facial expressions and his gestures were like those of Gulliver. He was doing his best to copy the big man's style as he railed against those who had left and warned those who remained.

Tom recognized a few words and heard repeated reference to jambi. Gulliver, whose vocabulary was consid-

erably larger, chuckled softly. "He's really lacin' into them boys," he said. "He's tellin' 'em what things I'll do if they's any repeats o' last night's performance."

Manga paused and one of the Indians leaped to his feet. He pointed directly to Gulliver and said, "Supay!"

Gulliver's chuckle froze. His forehead wrinkled. "That," he said, "I don't like." The other Indians were silent and their faces expressionless as they looked in Gulliver's direction.

"What did that fellow say?" asked Tom.

"He called me Supay. That means the Evil One. Supay is supposed to be the evil genius o' the jungle, an' if the rest o' the boys git that idea, things won't be so good."

Manga's meeting broke up silently. The men went to their work of breaking camp.

The travel that day was harder than ever. The trail had disappeared entirely and every foot of progress was made only after strong-armed machete men cut through the wildest imaginable tangle of tropical growth and vines as thick as a man's wrist.

As the morning advanced, the heat became almost intolerable. Tom's clothes were wringing wet with sweat. They clung to his body with an unpleasant, clammy feeling. Unexpected branches seemed to spring from nowhere, slapping at his face and ripping the netting that was supposed to give protection against insects. The knapsack chafed until his back felt raw. His feet sank inches deep in sticky muck and the effort of pulling them out at every step made his leg muscles ache with weariness.

As noon approached with a gain of less than a mile to show for the morning-long fight against the jungle, Tom's spirits were at low ebb. Every muscle in his body cried out for relief. Insects had found holes in his net and had stung his face in several places.

He turned and looked at Whiz, who followed him. The reporter's face was flushed and sweaty. He, too, had suffered from the insects, and a low branch had lashed one cheek and left an ugly welt.

"Tough going, eh?" grunted the reporter gamely with a brave attempt to smile.

Tom nodded.

Gulliver was ahead of Tom. He had taken a machete to relieve the Indians. Tom could see his magnificent muscles rippling beneath the sweat-soaked shirt as he swung the blade to cut away the rank, stinking growth.

Tom felt guilty. He felt responsible for the hardships that Gulliver and Whiz Walton were suffering to help him find his father. If there had only been some assurance of success, but there was nothing—nothing but uncertainty—vague hopes—possible death. Even if the party reached the village of Jatun-Jatun Curaca, there was no guarantee that the brujo could help.

Tom was almost ready to give up. He had no right to subject his friends to further misery and risk. Suddenly Gulliver stopped swinging the machete, and called a halt. He turned toward Tom as he wiped sweat from his eyes with his blue bandanna. In Gulliver's homely face, Tom saw nothing like defeat or discouragement. Gulliver apparently had no intention of giving up as long as he could stand and fight.

"It's tough goin'." He grinned. "How are yo' makin' out, Tom?"

Tom nodded without speaking.

"How about yo', Whiz?"

"Still with you," replied the reporter.

Gulliver spit on his hands, rubbed them together and took a fresh grip on the machete. He pointed with it toward the east.

"Right over yonder," he said to Tom, "is where we're goin' to learn about yo' dad." His voice rang in a way that brought a lump to Tom's throat. "We're gittin' closer all the time."

The keen blade flashed over Gulliver's head and fairly whistled as it came down in the beginning of a new onslaught against the unkillable jungle. Back and forth he swung the blade, slashing to the left and to the right in a way that brought clucks of admiration from the cholo boys.

And then with surprising suddenness, the jungle ended. For the first time since the preceding day, Tom saw the sky and the sun. The clearing ahead was large. It was at least two hundred yards to the wall of mottled green that marked the clearing's eastern edge.

The party stopped for the noonday rest.

Traveling beyond the clearing was easier. There were places where the machete men had to go ahead and cut a path, but there were also long stretches where Manga could take the lead.

An order of march had become established. Manga went in front to show the way. Directly back of him, ready to step up when called on, were the men with the

machetes. Gulliver followed these, and back of Gulliver, Tom, then Whiz.

The bearers of Gulliver's special packs came in single file behind the reporter and then the rest of the cholo boys with packs and the subcuracas whose duty it was to keep the line from stringing out too far.

Tom looked at his compass frequently and marveled at the way Manga held to a course that was due east. Gulliver had tried to instruct the Indian, but Manga had scorned such man-made aids to jungle travel. His disdain had been based on the fact that a compass might be lost or broken. One who depended on it would be helpless. He had tapped his forehead and explained that the compass in his brain could not be lost or broken. It could never lead him astray.

When the jungle thinned out during the late afternoon, Gulliver speeded the pace to make up some of the ground that had been lost during the morning. It was a fast pace that caused the gaps between the cholo boys to widen in spite of the subcuracas' efforts to keep them close together.

Manga halted at a shallow tributary of the Paute River. There was a sandy beach that looked inviting, and Gulliver gave the word to make camp.

Paco went into action to compensate for the fact that he had carried no pack. He gathered firewood, filled the canvas water buckets, opened the boxes that held food and made himself generally useful, while Manga checked off the cholo boys as they straggled in one at a time.

He counted all but five. Five men and the packs they carried failed to appear in camp. Manga waited, his face

impassive. Gulliver waited, but his face was a gathering thunderhead. He paced the ground with many glances at his big watch.

Finally he strode to where the Jivaro leader sat. "What about 'em?" he demanded. "Where's them critters an' their packs?"

Manga shook his head slowly. "No come," he said.

"Do yo' think they'll show up?"

"No show up. We wait long time. Indian not come now, never come."

Whiz and Tom had moved to Gulliver's side.

"Do you mean," asked Tom, "that five more of the men have deserted?"

Manga nodded affirmation.

"What about our packs?" asked Whiz.

"Pack thrown into bush."

"I suppose there's no use going back to look for them?"

"No use. Who carry?"

"He's right," Tom said. "Even if we found the packs, we couldn't carry them. Paco and that Indian called Tamba are the only reserves."

Gulliver's fury built up a terrific pressure, making his face red, then purple and then it burst out in an angry exclamation.

"By gobs, that does it!" He pointed to one of his personal cases and thundered, "Open that up! It's about time I show some jambi that'll let these critters know who's boss!"

CHAPTER 20

Gulliver's Black Magic

Gulliver went about his preparations grimly. He dipped into his packs and selected a rocket, a handful of Roman candles, several packages of firecrackers and a box of small chasers about the size of cigarettes. He fitted one of his specially constructed shells to the Very pistol, and placed the rocket upright against a log. Then he was ready.

He turned to Manga and said, "Yo' tell yo' boys that I'm brujo. I'm goin' to show 'em some brujería they won't forget."

Manga saluted, but he didn't obey immediately.

"Patronato—" he said.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Cholo boy already think you Supay. Cholo boy afraid."

"Yo' just tell 'em I'm not the Evil One. My jambi is good jambi. Tell the boys they're hijotos, an' I aim to do what's right by 'em. I'm agoin' to prove it." Gulliver pointed to the sky. "I'm agoin' to bring 'em presents from up there. Now go on an' talk an' when yo're done, I'll start things."

Manga turned to the men who had gathered close to watch Gulliver's strange proceedings. While he spoke, Gulliver picked up a stick and poked at one of the fires that had been built by Paco.

"What does hijotos mean?" Tom asked.

"It means my sons. The Injuns who've moved to the cities an' got jobs workin' in people's houses as servants like to be called hijotos. I'm tryin' it on these."

"Let's hope it works," said Whiz. "If we get many more desertions, we won't be able to go on."

Manga finished speaking.

"Yo' told 'em?" asked Gulliver.

The Indian saluted.

The eyes of every cholo boy and the unbandaged eye of Paco were fixed on Gulliver with unblinking steadiness.

"Here goes the show," the big man muttered.

He touched the fire with his stick, then waved the stick above his head while he threw firecrackers and chasers into the flames.

The popping firecrackers scattered the fire, throwing burning embers over a wide area, while the chasers shot out like tiny rockets, trailing fire and smoke as they streaked and zigzagged in all directions, some along the

ground, some in the air, and many toward the bug-eyed Jivaros.

One of the Indians was struck. He wasn't hurt, but his shriek of utter terror sounded like a death cry. He threw himself flat on the ground, burying his face in the sand.

Before the last firecracker had exploded, Gulliver grabbed the Roman candles in one hand and the Very pistol in the other. He stuck the fused ends of the candles into the fire, lighting all of them at once. The fireballs gleamed like varicolored stars as they geysered from the cases and arced gracefully through the twilight. Gulliver touched off the skyrocket with an expiring Roman candle.

There was a momentary lull while the fuse sputtered. Then dense smoke and sparks gushed from the rocket's jet. The rocket took off vertically. Up, up, up it went, higher and higher until it was lost to view with only the trailing plume of fire remaining visible. When the rocket broke, the sky was filled with colored lights. There was also a tiny parachute, weighted with a paratrooper made of cardboard. It floated slowly to the earth as the colored stars expired and landed not far from where Tom Quest was sitting on the sand.

Gulliver hurried to the spot and as he bent to pick up the soldier, he winked to Tom and in a low voice muttered, "How am I doin'?"

He didn't wait for a reply. He swung toward the Indians and held the soldier high above his head so all could see.

"Supay," he bellowed, waving the paratrooper. Slap-

ping his chest he said, "Me fix Evil One. Me burn Supay!"

He threw the paratrooper into the campfire while the Indians breathed low-voiced exclamations of awe.

And then, the climax! Gulliver fired the Very pistol. The shell shot out, and rose high. When it exploded there was a shower of beads, bright stars of tissue paper and tinsel, small bits of colored cloth and other things that Jivaros might look upon as jambi. The beach was studded with the trinkets.

"Now, Manga," Gulliver said, "tell the boys to pick that stuff up. Tell 'em that's good jambi an' they're to keep it with 'em. Yo' can also tell 'em that I'll give 'em more good jambi from time to time as long as they stick with us, but if any more o' them desert, I'll bring old Supay out o' that there fire to punish 'em."

Manga himself was terrified. He understood only a part of what Gulliver said, but he managed to convey the message to the others.

Gulliver sat down with Tom and Whiz and wiped his sweating forehead.

"I don't know," he said, "how that went over, but it was worth a try. We had to do somethin'."

"The Indians aren't doing what you said," observed Tom. "Look at them."

The Indians seemed afraid to touch the things that had fallen from the Very shell. They moved back, apart from the area and huddled in a group to carry on a low-voiced conversation.

Tom tried to learn from Manga what the Indians were saying, how they had reacted to Gulliver's display,

whether or not there would be any further desertions.

Manga was strangely silent. He simply shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. He claimed he did not know what the Indians were saying.

The evening meal that night was cooked by Gulliver. Of all the Indians, Paco was the only one who ventured close to the big man or his companions. Paco's inability to speak seemed to set him apart from the others. It was he who washed the cooking utensils and tin plates and put them in the packs until they would be needed for breakfast. It was Paco who prepared the beds and banked the campfire for the night.

That night, Gulliver himself took the first watch. He sat up until after midnight, keeping the campfire burning.

Paco took the second watch, then Manga, who remained on duty until daybreak. When Manga roused the camp he did it in fear and trembling. Gulliver's black magic had backfired and the Indian stood in fear of the big man's wrath.

In a faltering voice he tried to break the grim news gently. The camp was practically deserted. During the night, under the protective shroud of darkness, the Indians had slipped away. The packs were left where they had been deposited the night before, but there was no one to carry them.

The expedition had been reduced to five. Paco and Manga and the three white men.

CHAPTER 21

Death Strikes the Trail

It took considerable time for Manga with his limited knowledge of English to explain the desertion of the Indians. He had been fearful that such a thing would happen when they learned that the destination was the most powerful village in all the jungle country—the village where Jatun-Jatun Curaca lived and operated.

Gulliver asked if the fireworks display had had anything to do with the decision of the Jivaros to slip away. Manga assured him that this was not the case. They would have deserted anyway. They had planned to desert, and Gulliver's black magic nearly changed their minds. They had debated at some length whether or not they should leave. They feared the witchcraft of Gulliver, but Jatun-Jatun Curaca's deeds were legendary throughout the jungle country.

In his stilted way, Manga told Gulliver that what he had done in bringing jambi from the skies would be talked about for many days to come. Soon everyone would have heard about it. Then Gulliver would be acknowledged as a great brujo, but it would take many years for his fame to equal that of Rucu—The Old One—Jatun-Jatun Curaca.

Tom Quest waited until Gulliver had finished talking to Manga. Then he said, "Look here, Gulliver, we can't go far without the bearers. I—I can't ask you and Whiz to take any further chances for me. It should be a lot easier going over the back trail; the path is all cut for us. We—" He hesitated and then, with his heart in his boots, said, "Let's turn back."

"Not on yo' life," boomed Gulliver. "We've come this far to find that old humbug an' we're goin' the rest o' the way. How do yo' feel about it, Whiz?"

The reporter said, "I knew I was getting into something rugged when I started this expedition. If we turn back now we'll have wasted everything we've done. Where do we go from here?"

Gulliver studied his map. "From here," he said, "we follow along the bank o' this river for quite a spell. It twists an' bends some, but we'll have to tolerate that."

He pointed to a small "x" on the map. "Right at this here point," he continued, "there's a pretty steep waterfall. That's where we leave the stream. From there, we make a beeline at right angles to the compass needle. We head due east as the crow flies an' it ain't far."

He looked at Manga. "If yo'," he said, "are goin' to desert us, clear out right now. Tell Paco he can do the

same. I want to know where we stand an' what we can count on."

Manga spoke in Jivaro while Paco listened attentively. Then the dumb man nodded his bandaged head and made signs with his hands. Manga told the others that Paco would stick.

"An' what about yo'?"

Manga saluted and his brown eyes held a look of loyalty. "Me stick," he said.

Gulliver nodded emphatically. "That," he said, "settles it."

Tom indicated the many boxes. "What about all the equipment?" he asked. "We'll have to leave it right here, won't we?"

"We'll have to cache most of it, Tom. We'll make five packs o' the stuff we can't git along without, an' each of us will carry one."

The next hour was spent in rearranging the packs. With a heavy heart, Gulliver set aside many of the boxes, vials and bottles from his precious medicine chest. He put these in a separate waterproof container, scooped a hole in the sand, and buried it carefully to be reclaimed if possible on the return journey.

He retained the fireworks and trading goods as well as the Very pistol and its shells, explaining, "If I got to make an impression on old Jatun-Jatun Curaca, I'll need all o' these things."

Whiz Walton kept his high-priced camera suspended from a strap around his neck and the rest of the photography equipment was to be left behind. The ammunition supply was reduced to bare essentials and all that was

bulky in the way of food was set aside. Only concentrated rations could be carried. Everything that had been culled was packed in cases and stacked on the riverbank. Gulliver refashioned the packs that were to be carried.

It was midmorning when the five men set out along the river. The sun beat down mercilessly from a cloudless sky. The soft sand made walking hard, but Tom and Whiz had no complaint. It was much better than cutting through the insect-infested tangle of green jungle.

There were three nights in camp without incident. On each of the subsequent mornings, Tom Quest had wakened with a feeling of uncertainty that had endured until he knew that Paco and Manga were still on hand.

At noon of the fourth day, during the pause for the midday meal, two Jivaros armed with blowguns came down the river in a dugout and put in on the beach near camp. They announced their coming in loud voices indicating that they came in no unfriendly spirit.

The rituals of hospitality were observed by Manga. The Indians were welcomed and fed generously. The white men followed the conversation with Manga acting as interpreter.

Gulliver seemed highly pleased to learn that they had heard about him. Tom was surprised at the way the Indians had described the big man's brujería. The story had gained stature in retelling. As the Indians had heard it, Gulliver had pointed at the sky and uttered a command. Rain had come instantly. Each raindrop, as it hit the ground, had turned first into a ball of living fire, then into an article of priceless value. Gulliver wore a smile long after the Indians had said good-bye.

The next morning, after about two hours of travel, Tom Quest startled his companions with a sudden shout of "Look ahead!"

He had been the first to sight the waterfall.

"That's it!" shouted Gulliver. "We're agittin' there, Tom. It ain't agoin' to be long now before we know what's what about yo' pa."

Fifteen minutes later, they reached the waterfall and stopped to rest.

Referring to his compass, Tom Quest learned that the river at that point ran almost north and south. It was wide but shallow and the fording was made without difficulty. On the eastern bank Gulliver settled his pack more comfortably, and hitched up his belt.

"From now on," he reminded the others, "it's a beeline from here. We just travel due east until we fetch up at another river. That's where the village is at, an' that's where we'll find Jatun-Jatun Curaca."

There was a fair path through the jungle. It meandered a bit, but the route was generally to the east.

Eager to reach their destination, the quintet traveled later than usual. Darkness was well advanced before Gulliver called a halt. While the others made the simplest kind of camp, he built a fire and heated a pan of water to which he added a can of dehydrated food. The resultant mashlike mixture made up in nourishment what it lacked in flavor.

Gulliver disposed of his portion as if it were medicine to be taken as quickly as possible. Tom and Whiz spooned up their meal without enthusiasm.

"It's too bad," observed Whiz Walton, "you had to

cache all those trick condiments of yours. Seasoning would help this stuff a lot."

"This pulin' stuff?" Gulliver snorted, "Humph! No amount o' seasonin' could do this any good. This here glop is too near sawdust. But this ain't no time to pamper our gullets. While yo're gittin' that fodder inside of yo', I'll tell yo' how we're splittin' up the guard duty. Tom, yo' take the first watch."

Tom nodded and said, "O.K."

"After an hour an' a half, yo' call Whiz." Gulliver pointed to the reporter. "Yo're on number two watch. When yo've done yo' trick, yo' wake up Manga. Manga will call me an' I'll call Paco."

Manga translated for Paco's benefit and the man who couldn't speak nodded to signify that he understood.

"When Paco is done," Gulliver continued, "he's to rouse all of us an' we'll git gittin'."

It worked out just as Gulliver had planned as far as Manga. Manga did not call Gulliver. The big man wakened of his own accord and looked at his watch.

"What in thunderation," he muttered to himself. "Manga should o' called me twenty minutes ago."

He sat up and looked around. The fire had burned low and the glowing coals gave off very little light, but it was sufficient to illuminate the sleeping forms. Tom and Whiz were on one side of the fire and Paco on the other. Manga was sprawled on the ground directly across from Gulliver.

Gulliver muttered angrily as he got to his feet and circled the fire. "What's the idea o' fallin' asleep?" he demanded. "Wake up, Manga."

He reached out to shake the Indian, but his hand stopped abruptly.

He saw the machete.

The point and several inches of the wide blade were buried in Manga's back. Manga was not sleeping.

He was dead!

CHAPTER 22

Gulliver's Capture

Gulliver was sure that Manga was dead. The position of the machete was such that there was little room for doubt. Nevertheless, he knelt beside the fallen Indian and made an examination to confirm his first impression. Then he stayed there, on his knees, and scratched his chin while he pondered.

He knew that information spread through the jungle with telegraphic speed, and in a manner no white man could explain. The visiting Indians had known of Gulliver's brujería. If they knew this, they probably knew other things about the white men. They must have known where the little band was heading. They could have learned that from the deserters.

Had Manga been killed by savages from the village where Jatun-Jatun Curaca lived? This seemed like a reasonable explanation.

Gulliver rose to his feet. He had a feeling that he was being watched—and he was right.

He was watched by many pairs of dark eyes as he stood outlined against the fire. Dark forms crept nearer through black shadows.

Gulliver started around the fire to get his gun, which he had left beside his blanket. He had taken but a single step when a rock struck the back of his head. He knew a momentary flash of dazzling white, then nothing. His knees buckled, but before he collapsed to the ground six half-naked savages leaped forward and caught him.

They placed him on a litter and quickly lashed his hands and feet while other members of the band hurried to where Gulliver had been sleeping and collected his packs and guns. Silently then, the Jivaros moved off in the darkness without disturbing any of the others.

The whole procedure had been carried out with the precision of a well-drilled football team. There had been no sound other than the soft thud of the blow that felled the mighty Gulliver.

Tom Quest wakened at daybreak without being called. When he opened his eyes, he saw Paco standing over him holding a machete. He acted instinctively, and with the agility of a panther. He rolled to one side, coming out of the roll in a crouch. He charged like a football player, tackling Paco around the knees.

Paco uttered a guttural note of surprise as the force of Tom's charge struck him. He fell to the ground directly on top of Whiz Walton. Tom was on his feet. He snatched the machete and held it with the point toward Paco.

"Hey!" exclaimed Whiz Walton. "What's going on here?"

"I don't know," replied Tom, "but I'm going to find out."

"Where's Gulliver?"

For the first time Tom realized that his big friend was not on hand.

Paco wore a look of helpless pleading as he made meaningless noises in his throat.

"When I wakened," Tom said, "he was standing over me holding this machete. That's all I know."

Paco pointed toward Manga, who lay on the ground near by.

"Still sleeping," Whiz said. "It takes a lot to wake him."

Paco ran around the fire to the dead man's side. He turned the body over and pointed to the red-stained slit in Manga's shirt.

It took but a moment to realize that Manga was dead.

In the excitement of the moment both Tom and Whiz forgot that the man with the bandaged head couldn't speak. They turned on him abruptly with accusations and questions about the dead man and Gulliver's whereabouts.

Then Tom said, "Hold on, Whiz. This won't get us anywhere. Paco understands a little Spanish and I know a few words of Jivaro. If he has anything to tell us, he'll have to do it by making signs."

Tom Quest showed infinite patience in extracting from Paco a few meager details. There was little the Indian

could tell. Using many gestures and facial expressions, he managed to explain that he had awakened after the darkness of the night had gone. Gulliver had been missing. Manga was dead with the machete protruding from his back. Paco had withdrawn the jungle knife. He was about to waken Tom. That was when Tom had opened his eyes and got the impression that the Indian was about to swing the heavy machete.

Paco seemed convincing. Furthermore, his story was confirmed by footprints in the soft ground.

Tom studied the impressions made by bare feet.

"There must have been six or seven of them here," he said.

"And look at this." Whiz Walton pointed to marks that were much larger than the others—marks that had been made by Gulliver in his stocking feet.

Tom traced the prints from the place where Gulliver had slept to the side of the fallen native.

"All of his stuff is gone, too," said Whiz. "His packs and guns—even his boots. This is a fine kettle of fish. What do you make of it?"

"Golly, I don't know what to think. They must have carried Gulliver away."

"He's a mighty big load," said Whiz. "If they carried him away, they must have wanted him alive."

Whiz had seen death in many forms during his years as a metropolitan reporter. He was accustomed to its nearness, hardened to it. But Tom Quest was different. He was stunned and shocked and found it hard to think clearly. There was a shred of hope in the reporter's words.

"You—you think," he said, "Gulliver might be alive?"

"I'd say so. They didn't bother to carry Manga away."

"Manga," repeated Tom. "The poor guy."

Whiz had been covering the ground with the keen eye and sharp instinct that had made his name nationally famous. He examined the pattern of the footprints—the condition of the fire—the place where Manga had been sitting and the red stain where he had fallen.

"Here," he said, "is how I dope it out. You took your turn as guard and called me on schedule. I called Manga. If he got the works while he was sitting up, it must have been during his trick on guard duty."

"There's only one thing for us to do," Tom Quest decided. "First of all, we've got to bury Manga. Then we've got to follow the trail of those men who captured Gulliver."

"Either that," said Whiz, "or turn back."

"I'm not going to turn back," Tom said stubbornly. "I'm going to try to find Gulliver and I think I know where to look for him."

"Where's that?"

"The Jivaro village. We're mighty close to it now, Whiz, and Gulliver said it's due east. Look at where those footprints go," Tom pointed. "They go right along the trail in the direction of the village."

Gulliver's pack was gone, but the one that Manga had carried was still on hand. Opening it, Tom distributed the contents.

"From now on," he said, "each of us will have to carry a heavier load."

It was easy digging a grave for the dead Indian in the soft, sandy earth.

When the job was done, Whiz nodded grimly. "I wonder," he grunted as he lifted his pack, "what is going to happen next."

CHAPTER 23

Perro's Return

Tom made Paco understand that he was to replace Manga as guide and lead the way to the Jivaro village, due east of the place where Gulliver had disappeared.

The tracks of Gulliver's captors had faded out on hard ground after the first few minutes. Then the trail narrowed to a path less than eighteen inches wide, hemmed in by jungle growth. There were innumerable turns, but Paco seemed to know his way, so Tom and Whiz followed without question.

They came to water, a trickling stream less than two yards wide.

"This can't be what we're looking for," Whiz said.

"Hardly."

"Yet it's a stream of water, and Gulliver said we'd find the village at the first stream."

Tom reached for his compass. A blank expression crossed his face.

"What's the matter?" asked the newshound.

"My compass." Tom inspected his other pockets.

"What about it?"

"It's gone. I can't find it."

"I'll get mine out." Whiz dug into his watch pocket. "Hey!" he said. "Mine's gone, too!"

"Gosh, Whiz, what do you make of that?"

"I don't know what to make of it, but I don't like it."

"Can't be coincidence."

"Of course it's not coincidence. Tom, we've been robbed. I wonder what else happened while we slept."

Tom looked toward Paco who stood a few yards distant.

"I wonder if that guy has anything to do with it. I've had a feeling that we were traveling in the wrong direction."

"Paco seemed to know where he was going," Whiz said.

"But I want to know, too. I'd give a lot for a compass."

Tom opened his emergency kit and dumped out the contents.

"There may be one in here," he said.

"I doubt it."

The two were on their hands and knees pawing through each item.

"Paco may have told the truth about last night," the reporter said, "but there's something about that guy that doesn't ring true. I—"

"Wait!"

"What is it, Tom?"

Tom had found the toy magnet that was one of many

knickknacks to be used for trading with the Indians.

"This," he said, "gives me an idea."

He took a needle from the sewing kit and with it began stroking the magnet's poles.

"What in blazes are you doing?"

"A compass," Tom replied, "is nothing but a magnetized needle. I'm making a compass."

"How are you going to use it?"

"I'll show you, if you'll get a cup of water."

Whiz unhooked the drinking cup from his belt and filled it at the stream.

Tom picked up a weed and tore off a section of leaf about a quarter the size of a postage stamp. He dropped it in the water, then placed the needle on the leaf.

"Now watch," he said.

The floating needle turned, then stopped.

"The point shows north and the eye of the needle is toward the south."

"You sure?"

"It can't be any other way." Tom moved the needle with his finger, but it returned to the same position.

Two pairs of eyes met over the cup. The same grim realization came to Whiz and Tom at the same moment. The eye of the needle pointed to the back trail. They had been traveling due north instead of east!

Both were silent for a moment as they fitted together in their minds the many puzzling things which had been troubling them in regard to Paco.

"Tom," said Whiz, breaking the silence. "That scar on this fellow's hand. Doesn't it—?"

"You're absolutely right, Whiz!" Tom interrupted ex-

citedly. "I noticed the back of his hand a couple of times but the truth never dawned on me until just now."

The back of the hand beneath the dark stain showed evidence of a recent burn.

"That's just where Perro was burned with Gulliver's branding chemical."

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Whiz Walton.

Tom turned quickly and grabbed the dirty bandage on the other's head.

"Let's see what's under that rag!" He snatched it off.

It was Alonzo Perro's hair beneath the bandage. The Ecuadorian was more nearly recognizable with both eyes visible. He struggled desperately. He found a voice that had been silent for many days and brought forth explosive curses and snarls.

"You gave yourself away," barked Tom, "when you stroked your lip just like you used to stroke your mustache."

"So now you know!" shrieked Perro.

He gave a sudden, unexpected wrench with hysterical strength and broke loose from Tom's grip. His hand darted beneath his shirt and came out with a small gun as Tom charged in. Before Perro could bring the gun to bear, Tom's fist shot up in a sharp jab to the point of Perro's brown-stained chin. Tom followed the blow with a left jab to the stomach, then, as Perro gasped and staggered back, brought his right around in a full swing that landed on the button.

Perro's eyes went glassy. He slumped face forward to the ground.

"Gosh," said Whiz Walton admiringly, "you certainly sailed into him."

Tom's eyes were moist with tears of rage. "He's the one!" Tom said. "He's the one that's responsible for anything that happens to Gulliver!"

"Take it easy, boy," replied the reporter. "Now that we know who he is, we may learn a few things."

CHAPTER 24

Perro Gives Ground

WHILE ALONZO PERRO was unconscious, Whiz Walton went through his pockets and found the missing compasses. There was nothing else of importance. Tom, in the meantime, had opened the pack that carried some of Perro's personal effects as well as camp equipment. He found a small manila envelope, the flap of which was held down by a clasp.

Tom tore back the flap and pulled out a number of folded maps. He spread out the first one and let out an exclamation.

"Whiz, look here!"

"That looks familiar," the reporter said.

"It's the map John Hanford made. The one that was stolen from the plane in Miami."

"Score another against Perro. Look over the rest of that stuff, Tom, while I douse some water on this bird. We've got to make him talk. He seems to know this

country and I'll bet all the tea in China he can lead us to the Jivaro village if he wants to."

"He's got to," Tom said firmly.

Tom found another map, the lettering of which indicated that it, too, had been made by the engineer, John Hanford. Various waterways were clearly shown as well as Jivaro villages. Clearings in the jungle were marked and crisscrossing dotted lines probably showed trails through the jungle. There was one figure Tom couldn't understand. It was an irregular circle in an area that was far from waterways, trails and villages. It was identified merely by an "x."

Tom laid this aside intending to question Perro about it. There were more maps, but Perro was responding to a cup of water Whiz had dashed in his face. He sputtered and gasped, then opened his eyes.

Whiz handled him none too gently. "Snap out of it," he ordered. He grabbed Perro by the front of the shirt and jerked him to a sitting position.

"Wake up. You've got a lot to say."

Perro's face was a blank at first and then his eyes became filled with fear.

"Señor," he began, "I—"

Tom Quest cut him off sharply. "You listen to me, Perro. We know a lot about you. We know you're the one who helped John Hanford make his escape. What's more, the police know it. They've identified the fingerprints on the getaway car as yours and they've recaptured John Hanford. We know you trumped up a lot of lies when you were in New York and that you're the one who made that bomb—" Tom paused and Whiz cut in.

"We're going to lay our cards right on the table," he said. "You and Hanford were together on some kind of a scheme. The success of that scheme depended on keeping us out of this jungle. What's the scheme?"

Perro shook his head slowly. "I—" he said, "I—have nothing to say."

The reporter had dealt with stubbornness on many occasions. "You can talk or not just as you please, Perro. But get this straight. You're going to need a couple of friends. You're going to need 'em bad. We're no friends, but we're acquaintances, and we can help you or not."

Perro shrugged his shoulders.

"Manga was killed this morning. Manga has a lot of friends among the Indians. Suppose we take you back and tie you up until some of Manga's friends find you? We might even help them find you by dropping a word or two in the right places."

Perro's eyes widened. "No, no, no! You cannot do that!" he said. "I did not kill Manga! I swear I didn't do it. It was just as I told you. He was dead when I wakened."

"We believe you. You needn't try to convince us you didn't kill him. Save it for the Jivaros who find you—or—would you rather tell us what we want to know?"

The small man considered the proposition for a moment. "What do you want to know?" he said.

"Everything. We want to know what Hanford was up to. Why you were helping him. How much you had to do with Gulliver's disappearance, and a lot of other things."

"If I answer your questions—then what?"

"If you give us straight answers, we'll take you along

with us as a prisoner and you can take your chances with the law."

"That is a promise?"

Whiz nodded.

Perro turned to Tom, who said, "You have our word for it, Perro." He glanced at his watch. "But you'd better make up your mind because we're not going to fool around. We've got to find Gulliver and we've got to find the Jivaro village."

Perro was no fool. Far from it. He knew he could take the word of Tom Quest and Whiz Walton. He knew that there was little the law in Guayaquil could bring against him. He knew, too, that his chances of survival if his fate was to be decided by the Jivaros were scant indeed. Moreover, his death would be an exceedingly unpleasant one.

He said, "I'll talk, señores. Where do you want me to start?"

"At the beginning. But remember, you're to tell the truth and nothing else."

There was a nod of understanding.

Perro looked at Tom and said, "It goes back ten years when John Hanford went into the jungle on the expedition with your father. After Gulliver had taken you back to the States, your father and Hanford carried their explorations into the deepest part of the jungle. They went where no one had ever gone before them."

Perro reached and picked up one of the maps. "This," he said, "shows the country they explored. It was there that they made their great discovery."

Tom pointed to the circle marked "x."

"That circle?"

"Yes."

"What is it, a gold mine?"

The other shook his head. "Nothing like that," he said. "There is nothing of value in the land—but the land itself represents a fortune. That circle is a mesa."

"A mesa?" Whiz cut in. "What's worth while about a hunk of tableland?"

"That mesa is of great size. The top is perfectly flat and the surface is hard rock. It is large enough for a big plane to land and take off."

"So what?"

"Señor, you do not see the possibilities?"

"Not yet, but keep talking," the reporter said.

"Hanford and Quest knew of fabulous resources that the jungle has held locked up all these centuries. There are rubber, fine wood, minerals, precious stones and many other things, all of which have been inaccessible. To bring these out of the jungle, there have been only two routes. One—through the Amazon Basin and across all of Brazil to the Atlantic Coast. The other, over the Andes, the highest of mountains. Neither of these routes is practical. The cost of transportation would be prohibitive. But, señor, if these things could be carried by air—transportation would be cheap."

Whiz said, "I can see that."

"Get to the point," said Tom.

"It would be impossible to use air freight, because a plane could not land in the jungle country. To clear and make level a landing field would be impossible. But the mesa is ideally suited for landing! Hanford and

Hamilton Quest made exhaustive investigations. Then they disagreed."

"How come?"

"John Hanford wanted to keep the discovery a secret until he could form an airline and get an exclusive franchise to operate a jungle base. Hamilton Quest did not approve of that. His plan was to turn the discovery over to the government so the people of Peru and Ecuador could profit by it."

"So that was it," breathed Tom Quest softly.

"The argument became more and more heated and neither man would give way. When they got back to their base camp, Hanford did things to enrage the Indians and cause them to attack."

Tom's fists clenched until his fingernails bit into his palms. "So Hanford caused that attack!"

Perro nodded. "He nearly lost his own life. The Indians attacked before he expected them. Both he and Quest were captured and taken prisoner."

"How is it," asked Tom in a voice that quavered with emotion, "that Hanford escaped while my father remained a prisoner?"

Perro shrugged his shoulders.

Tom was on his feet. His voice trembled with emotion. "If you're lying, Perro, I—"

"I am telling you the truth. Hanford told me only that he was alone when he escaped."

Tom remained silent. It was evident that Perro did not know the whereabouts of Hamilton Quest.

Whiz took over the questioning. "Where do you enter the picture?"

"When Hanford finally came out of the jungle, he had his maps. We met in Guayaquil and we became well acquainted. He learned of my connections and thought I might be of use in securing the franchise he wanted from Quito and Lima. We became partners. I agreed to take care of the franchise if he would raise the necessary money."

"That's why he wanted cash, eh? That also explains why he had to keep his plans a secret."

Perro said, "If word of his discovery leaked out, the Peru and Ecuador governments would not grant the franchise. He had to make the officials think his plan was unsound.

"I kept in close touch with Señor Hanford. I went to Texas by plane when word came that he was in jail. I tried to help him escape. I did so, but he was shot. I had to leave him and carry on alone. I left by plane for New York."

"You," said the reporter, "were mighty anxious to keep us away from here. You went to a lot of trouble to get close to us so you could learn our plans and steal that map. You tried to make us think John Hanford was the guilty party. In Guayaquil you were going to kill Tom Quest."

"I—I do not think I would have killed him."

"Don't lie to me! You *did* intend to kill him. You came along on this trip for the same reason. You were ready to go to any extreme to stop us! I'll bet you intended to run that machete through Tom this morning. Now stick to the truth! By the way, how did you get Hanford's knife?"

"It was a gift from Hanford. I admired it, and he gave it to me."

Whiz hammered home another question. "Why were you afraid to let us get into this region?"

"There are some Indians who know about the mesa. In the search for Hamilton Quest, you might find them. That is why I wanted you to turn back."

"Did you have anything to do with the desertion of the cholo boys?"

"No, no, señor, I had no part in that. I swear it. They left because you were going to the place where Jatun-Jatun Curaca lives. They were afraid."

"Some things were stolen from our kits."

"The cholo boys did that. I—I have told you all that I have done."

"Like blazes you have! What about stealing our compasses?"

"It was an opportunity! I wakened, just as I told you, and found Manga dead and Gulliver gone. I knew I would have to get your compasses before I could lead you away from the powerful brujo."

"You think he'll know something about Hamilton Quest?"

"No, but he might know about the mesa. But, now, señor, it does not matter. You have the map. Hanford is recaptured and may die in prison. I—" Perro shrugged his shoulders. "I know when I am finished. Now I can only ask you to keep your word and take me in safe custody to Guayaquil. The return is not hard. The jungle paths have been cut. I can show you the way."

"What do you know about Gulliver?"

"Nothing."

"Why was he captured?"

"I do not know."

"Do you think he's being held in that Jivaro village?"

"It is possible."

Whiz stood. "Get up," he commanded. "You're going to take us there!"

Tom had been silent since the disappointing admission by Perro that he had no idea where Hamilton Quest was to be found.

Whiz placed a hand on the lad's shoulder and said, "We've got Gulliver to think of."

Tom nodded. "I know it." He squared his shoulders, lifted his chin and picked up his pack. "I'm ready."

CHAPTER 25

Captured

After his exposure, Perro was meek and submissive. Utterly defeated in all of his plans, he hoped to escape with his life by co-operating as far as Tom and Whiz would let him. He walked ahead of them, following the back trail to a point where several paths converged.

"This," he said, "is where I led you astray."

"You took us north," Tom replied, "when we should have gone east to reach the Jivaro village. Is that right?"

Perro nodded.

Tom looked at his compass—the one that Perro had stolen.

"According to what Gulliver told us," he said pointing, "we should go that way."

"That is right, señor."

"All right, get going."

The trail during the first fifteen minutes was closely walled by tangled jungle growth. Then it widened. Tom

and Whiz were able to walk side by side a couple of paces behind Perro.

They trudged along, stepping over outcropping roots. From time to time Whiz Walton or Tom Quest made a brief comment, but these comments were spaced by increasingly long intervals of silence broken only by the steady rhythm of footsteps and the familiar noises of the jungle.

Then Tom Quest spoke suddenly. "Hold it, Perro!" he said.

Perro stopped and turned questioningly.

"What's the matter?" demanded Whiz.

"Listen."

From somewhere ahead came the faint sound of rippling water. Tom glanced at his watch. It was midafternoon.

"You hear that?" he asked Whiz Walton softly. "It sounds like a stream."

The reporter nodded. "A big one."

"We have but a short distance to go," said Perro. "I think—"

Perro left his sentence suspended in mid-air. His mouth hung open; his eyes were wide and staring at something behind Tom Quest. Earlier that day Tom had seen Perro's face distorted with abject fear, but that was nothing compared to the frozen expression of stark terror that now paralyzed his features.

Tom turned and voiced a short exclamation of astonishment. Three half-naked savages stood on the trail less than six feet away. Others were stepping from behind trees, making no more noise than shadows.

There were nearly a dozen of them. Each one held a spear poised menacingly. Those spears told the story. These Indians were no casual hunters. Hunters carried blowguns, darts and gourds filled with curare to poison their darts. Jivaro Indians carried spears for only one purpose—to meet an enemy.

Tom heard Whiz Walton speak in a low whisper.

"This," muttered the reporter, "looks like the works."

"At least we can give 'em a battle," Tom replied.

He reached for his gun, but the nearest Jivaro extended his spear and pressed the sharp point against Tom's wrist as a gesture of warning. He held it there while the other Indians closed in and relieved the white men of their weapons and packs.

Perro found his voice and uttered a few words in the Jivaro tongue. The tallest of the Indians replied with expressions that neither Tom nor Whiz could understand.

Perro translated. "They are taking us to their village. Their chief sent them out to get us. His name is Yasacama."

"How did he know about us?" Whiz Walton demanded. "Ask them that."

Perro spoke to the tall Indian but received no reply.

Tom said, "Ask them if Gulliver is there. Ask them if they're taking us to the village of Jatun-Jatun Curaca."

Perro made several attempts, but the Indians seemed to have said all they were going to say.

Three of them shouldered the packs and started toward the village while others indicated by gestures

with their spears that the white men were to follow the bearers.

It was sunset when they came to a spot where the jungle ended abruptly. A grassy plain extended for a considerable distance; the village of the Jivaros lay a quarter of a mile ahead. There were innumerable buildings walled with split bamboo and roofed with a thick thatch. Some rested on the ground, while others were raised several feet on stilts. The huts sprawled along the west bank of a wide, muddy river.

The white men and their captors were greeted with shouts and excited cries. The entire village, it seemed, men, women and children of all ages, came out to meet them. They became the center of an excited crowd of shouting Indians.

A shrill whistle cut through the bedlam. Instantly every voice was still. The villagers fell back and turned to face their chief. Chief Yasacama approached majestically holding in his mouth a nickel-plated whistle of the type used by traffic policemen.

Yasacama was the fattest man Tom Quest had ever seen. His small dark eyes were set in puffs of flesh. They were intelligent eyes, level and penetrating. His round face was sober but not savage. The chief looked like a man who could smile easily. His hair, held down by a red band, was cut in a perfectly straight line extending across the eyebrows and continuing over the ears. He wore a necklace made of blanket pins from which were suspended a number of articles including sleigh bells, a pocketknife, a small magnifying glass and a number of door keys and small disks of brass.

He wore a blanket over his shoulders and trousers

that came just below the knees. His ankles were encased in a pair of spats made from old canvas gym shoes, the bottoms of which had been cut off. His feet were bare.

Chief Yasacama slitted his eyes and looked first at Whiz Walton. Surprisingly he spoke in English.

"You," he said pointing. "Name?"

"My name is Whiz Walton. What's it to you?"

The reporter's manner was defiant. He stood on the balls of his feet with his hands made into fists and his shoulders hunched belligerently.

Yasacama turned to the men with spears and said a few words in his native tongue. One of the men stepped forward and returned Whiz Walton's gun.

Yasacama turned to Tom. "You name?"

"I'm Tom Quest."

The chief's face relaxed and the corners of his mouth broke into a trace of a smile. Tom's gun was returned by the spearman who had taken it. And then Chief Yasacama's face grew stern and his brow became furrowed with lines of anger. He looked at Alonzo Perro. He pointed, but instead of speaking as he had to Tom and Whiz, he looked questioningly at the Indians who had brought the white men into camp.

Each of these spoke in turn. Tom didn't know what they said, but the effect on Perro was astonishing. The Ecuadorian fell to his knees. He groveled on the ground as he talked in Jivaro. His tone was one of pleading and supplication that Yasacama seemed to ignore. At a word from Yasacama, several Indians stepped forward, gripped Perro by the arms and jerked him to his feet. When Perro struggled, he was lifted bodily off the ground and carried away.

And then Tom Quest saw Gulliver. He saw him and he heard him at the same time. The big man came on the run from a thatched building on stilts near the riverbank and as he ran he bellowed at the top of his voice.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Whiz Walton. "Listen to him!"

The eyes of every villager, including those of Chief Yasacama, were turned to face the big man.

"What in thunderation," boomed Gulliver, "is the idea o' not tellin' me what's goin' on? Why didn't yo' say yo'd found my pards?" He came to a halt in front of Yasacama and waved his mighty fists as he roared and thundered. "Yo' double-distilled, triple-twisted balloon-shaped tub o' lard," he ranted. "Yo' fetch me here to do yo' favors an' I agree to do that same—"

Gulliver broke off abruptly and stared at Perro, who was being taken to a small hut that stood apart from all the others. His voice grew shrill as he exclaimed, "That there critter! His skin where it was covered with the bandage is white!"

"That there critter," mimicked Whiz Walton, "is the one we knew as Paco."

"Yeah, but—"

"He was disguised as an Indian," Tom said. "It's Alonzo Perro. We'll tell you all about it when we have a chance."

"Wait," replied Gulliver, "till I git done talkin' to Chief Yasacama. I got to lay into him like I'm in a horn-tossin' mood with my bristles up or he'll think I got no gravel in my gizzard."

"Does he have any idea what you're talking about?" asked Tom.

"Naw. If he knowed some o' the things I've called him since I got here, he'd have his boys toss me over the bank for the alligators."

Yasacama touched the big man on the shoulder.

Gulliver barked, "Well?"

The chief grinned and said, "You talk more."

Gulliver nodded. "Yo' asked for it," he said, "an' here she is." He unleashed a stream of vituperation the like of which neither Tom nor Whiz had ever heard. He ran through his entire vocabulary of insulting remarks.

Yasacama seemed immensely pleased. He reached forward when Gulliver had finally finished and with his pudgy hand he patted the big man on the cheek, and said, "Big brujo."

Gulliver let out a prodigious sigh. To Tom he said, "I been widdle-whangin' around here workin' up a frothy spell since daybreak. I had to do aplenty o' yowlin' to persuade his nibs to send his boys out to bring in yo' two."

"But I don't understand," Tom said. "What's this all about?"

"I'll tell yo' the whole thing when we git to my headquarters."

"Your headquarters?" repeated Whiz Walton.

Gulliver pointed to the house on stilts. "His nibs threw a couple o' Injuns out o' that place to make room for me. It smells pretty lively inside, but for the time we'll be here, we can be as cozy as toads under a cabbage leaf."

"But what," asked Tom, "about Perro?"

"We got to swap notes on that buzzard."

CHAPTER 26

Justice of the Jungle

THE HUTS on the riverbank were raised on stilts to escape the sudden floods, the possibility of which had always to be considered. The riverbanks were several feet in height, but there were times evidently when the river overflowed.

Gulliver squatted on the floor of his hut facing Tom Quest and Whiz Walton.

"We got a lot to talk about," he said, "an' precious little time to do it. It's already startin' to git dark an' I got to put on a display o' jambi before it gits so dark that Yasacama can't see the trinkets that I'm agoin' to make fall out o' the skies. Yo' see," the big man went on, "I'm just about the most famous galoot in this here jungle."

"Because of the demonstration you put on the other day?" asked Tom.

"Yeah. Yasacama heard about that an' sent his boys

to git me. The chief has built himself a downright strong village here on account o' havin' a famous witch doctor. But from what he said, I gather that Jatun-Jatun Curaca's brujo has wore kind o' thin. When Yasacama heard what I was adoin' in that line, he figured he better see for himself.

"Now before I talk any more, Tom, tell me about Perro an' how he posed as Paco."

As briefly as possible Tom and Whiz Walton brought Gulliver up to date on events that had transpired since daybreak. They told about the missing compasses and the way in which Perro had led them astray; about the discovery of the burn on Perro's hand and the exposure of the impostor. They explained Perro's relationship to John Hanford. They told how Hanford and Hamilton Quest had found the mesa and how this had led to the disagreement that had, in turn, caused Hanford to plot the massacre of the expedition.

Tom produced the maps taken from Perro. "Perro was afraid we'd learn about the mesa from some Indians," he said. "He wanted to get rid of us so he could carry on with John Hanford's plans to capitalize on the mesa."

"The fact that Paco was Perro accounts for Manga's murder," Gulliver said.

"Didn't the Indians who captured you kill Manga?" Whiz Walton asked.

"Not on yo' life! They had orders from Yasacama to bring me in, but not to do no permanent injury to no one. They was creepin' close to our camp when they saw Perro an' Manga talkin' by the fire. Manga acted downright surprised an' then he got sore. He was goin' to

wake me up when Paco, or Perro, let him have it with a machete. Them's the facts as I got 'em from Yasacama."

"Perro was probably trying to make a deal with Manga," Tom suggested.

"That's about it," replied Gulliver. "Yasacama," he continued, "was goin' to send his boys back to bring in Paco an' punish him for the murder. I had a time persuadin' the chief to have yo' two brought in so's we could be together."

"How did Yasacama learn English?" Tom asked.

Gulliver leaned forward. "Tom," he said, "I think we're downright close to word about yo' dad. I think he was right here in this village long enough to teach Yasacama a few things."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Tom softly. "B-but Gulliver—" He faltered.

"Now wait a minute, son. I'm pretty sure I'm right. Yasacama don't know an awful lot o' English, but he's tossed off one or two expressions an' a couple o' cuss words that was favorites with yo' dad. I'll lay yo' two to one that we'll git the information we want from Yasacama or from the Old One."

Tom started to speak again, but he was interrupted. This time it was by Whiz Walton.

"You mean Jatun-Jatun Curaca?"

"Yeah. I've located his house. It's the one away over to the south on the bank o' the river. There's seven or eight guards around it to protect that old two-bit four-flusher."

Tom said, "Gulliver, I'm afraid it's no use."

"What do you mean, Tom?"

"Perro told us a lot of lies, but when he finally broke down I think we got the truth from him."

"Well?"

"Hanford never told him where Dad is being kept a prisoner."

There was a silence that endured for nearly half a minute.

Then Tom continued, "But as long as I know he's alive *somewhere* I'm sure we can find him."

"We'll do that," promised Gulliver. "As soon as I've showed Yasacama my magic, I'll just about own this here village. Then we'll git to talk to Jatun-Jatun Curaca. Yasacama tells me he speaks the white man's language better than the chief himself."

Tom produced the photograph showing the Indian who wore his mother's spiral brooch.

"If he can't give us a line on Dad," he said, "perhaps he can tell us where to find this Indian."

"Lemme have that picture, Tom. We'll question him from every angle we can think of, but first we got to show the chief our brujería. Gulliver pointed to the packs that had been brought by the natives to the hut. "Git them things opened up," he said, "an' we'll lay out some stuff that'll hit fat Yasacama square between the eyes."

"What about Perro?" asked Whiz Walton. "What do you think they'll do with him?"

"He," replied Gulliver briefly, "done murder. These Injuns have pretty solid ideas o' punishment."

As if the mention of his name had been a cue, Perro suddenly cried out in the shrill voice of panic. Through

the door of the hut, the white men saw him running. He sprinted ahead of half a dozen Indians, traveling like a hare pursued by hounds. As he ran he screamed.

One of the pursuing Jivaros threw a spear, but it fell short. Perro cut sharply to one side, then swerved to the other and continued toward the river.

Despite all the man from Ecuador had done to hurt him, Tom Quest found himself hoping that Perro might get away—escape the horrors that the Jivaros would mete out to punish a murderer.

Another spear fell short and then Perro was at the river's bank. He threw himself head foremost in a shallow dive and came to the surface with his arms flailing the water in a racing crawl toward the opposite bank. He halted suddenly in midstream. His head bobbed up and both arms shot into the air as he uttered a cry more piercing, more frenzied than anything Tom Quest had ever heard.

The water swirled and foamed about him. He fought wildly for several seconds and then went down. Tom Quest watched with horrified eyes as the churning and the bubbling continued. He watched until the river grew calm, but Perro did not reappear.

In a single word Gulliver accounted for the manner in which Perro had paid for all his crimes:

"Alligators."

CHAPTER 27

Trail's End

I AIM TO START out with the United States Marine Band, an' from there we'll work up to the big stuff," Gulliver announced when he was ready to begin his exhibition of white man's magic.

The phonograph and radio stood on the floor of the hut close to one of the split bamboo walls. The rest of Gulliver's material, most of which consisted of fireworks, had been set up by Tom and Whiz.

It was neither dark nor daylight. It was dark enough for the fireworks to be effective, yet not so dark that Gulliver's trinkets falling from the skies would be lost.

Tom and Whiz Walton had been given their instructions. Yasacama had assembled his villagers. Gulliver spit on his hands, rubbed them together, gave his belt a hitch and said, "Touch off them bombs."

Tom lit a master fuse connected to half a dozen mortars all of which went off simultaneously, firing ex-

plosive shells high into the air. The detonations shocked the natives and echoed from the surrounding forests.

Whiz Walton, stationed inside the hut, started the phonograph. The martial strains of Sousa's band playing "Stars and Stripes Forever" came from the flimsy structure.

Then it seemed to Yasacama everything happened at once. Pin wheels set on posts began to spin, throwing out hissing streamers. Fountains and geysers broke out with all their glory spouting brilliant plumes high into the air. Mines exploded throwing colored stars aloft, and there were Roman candles, colored lights and firecrackers. Rockets took off as fast as Gulliver could light the fuses, streaking skyward and exploding with startling displays of fire balls. Star shells broke high above the village, each one of which filled the heavens with a myriad of lights. Every color of the rainbow could be seen in the skies and on the ground and then the shower began—a shower of toys and trinkets from the Very shells that Gulliver fired as rapidly as he could load the pistol.

When the last of the firecrackers had exploded, darkness and silence settled over the village, but only for a second. Darkness gave way to a red glow within Gulliver's hut. Low moans of terror came from hundreds of throats.

Whiz Walton used the light of the red railroad signal flare to change the record on the phonograph. With a sardonic chuckle, he fitted the needle into the groove and then sat back to listen to the most frightful bedlam of jungle roars and snarls that had ever been recorded on a sound-effect record.

The natives pointed toward the hut with trembling

fingers. Yasacama, his face drawn with fear, touched Gulliver on the arm.

"Don't worry, fat boy," Gulliver said heartily. "I'll clear them wild animals out o' the village."

He let out a bellow that caused Yasacama to fall back several paces. The sounds within the hut stopped abruptly.

Gulliver advanced to the doorway with long, impressive strides.

"We got 'em," he said to Whiz. "We got 'em eatin' out o' my hand. Gimme that red torch."

The reporter passed the signal flare to the big man while Gulliver drew a smoke pot from his pack. It was one of the type used for daylight signals by the Army. When ignited, it gave off dense billows of green smoke. Holding this in one hand, and the red flare in the other, Gulliver returned to where Yasacama had been waiting and in the simplest of English gave the chief to understand that all the wild beasts had been reduced to green fumes which would be dissipated by the evening breeze.

Then Whiz came to his side carrying the silent phonograph and radio.

"We're ready for the smashing climax," he said to Gulliver.

"Yo' got everythin' out o' that shack?"

"Yeah."

"Is Tom ready?"

"Ready and waiting."

Gulliver saw Tom almost hidden in the tall grass at the side of the hut on the riverbank. Tom waved to signify that he was ready. Then Gulliver drew his pistol

and held it overhead. It was the signal for Tom to light a fuse connected to a charge of powder.

Tom waved and backed away. Gulliver counted five seconds while the fuse burned, then brought his pistol down slowly, taking careful aim at the hut. He fired and at that instant a sheet of flame broke out where the hut had been. The boom was deafening. The natives, all of them, including Yasacama, fell to the ground with wails and moans. One at a time they looked up cautiously, then stared at the most incredible display of jambi they had ever seen. The piles upon which the hut had stood were still in place, but the hut itself was gone.

Gulliver had to work on Yasacama. His jambi had frightened the chief immeasurably. It took ten minutes to convince him that the white men meant no harm—that Gulliver's powers would not be turned against the Jivaros.

Little by little, the chief's confidence returned. He was persuaded to touch the phonograph and then the radio. Gulliver showed him how to turn the knobs on the small battery-operated set and bring music and voices out of the talking box. When Yasacama finally mastered the operation of the radio and the phonograph his delight was something to behold. He sat on the ground surrounded by admiring villagers who responded to his mood.

Standing next to Gulliver, Tom Quest waited impatiently with his eyes on the hut where Jatun-Jatun Curaca was guarded. Gulliver finally noticed Tom's impatience.

"I reckon," he said, "it's about time we had our talk. Yo', Yasacama," he said, turning to the chief. "Yo' told me we could talk to the Old One after I'd showed yo' some big-league jambi. Now how about keepin' yo' promise?"

The chief turned off the radio, looked at Gulliver and said, "That good. You go."

"What about them spear-totin' boys that are all around the Old One's place?"

"Not hurt you."

"They hadn't better try it," muttered Gulliver.

He started toward the thatched hut with Tom on one side and Whiz Walton on the other, paying no attention to the voice of Yasacama speaking to the villagers in Jivaro.

At the door of the hut, the guards fell back. Gulliver was about to step inside when Tom said, "Wait, Gulliver. I don't like the looks of this."

Gulliver turned. The campfires revealed the fact that every villager had followed the trio and each one carried a weapon.

"Holy mackerel!" Whiz Walton said. "What do you make of that?"

Gulliver frowned darkly. "I don't know what to make of it. Tom, I—"

Gulliver was interrupted by a voice from within the hut.

"Tom," it said. "Tom!"

Gulliver wheeled. Jatun-Jatun Curaca stood just inside the door, with the light of campfires on his face. His

hair was snow white and he was quite thin, but his face was unmistakable. It was the face of the man who long ago had been given up for dead.

Gulliver tried to speak but failed. Words stuck in his throat. He could only stare with his mouth open.

It was an instant that seemed to last for hours.

The white-haired man spoke. "Tom. You are Tom Quest."

And then Tom knew the truth. All the years of waiting, of hoping and of praying had led to this moment. Now all uncertainty was gone. He forgot the perils of the jungle—the villagers with their spears and blowguns, the duplicity of Hanford and the crimes of Perro were swept from his brain.

Now, nothing mattered. He reached out and clutched the thin man's narrow shoulders between his brown, strong hands.

"Oh, gosh," he choked.

His eyes were shining and his heart seemed filled to the breaking point with an emotion that was nearly overpowering. He felt his father's arms about him and the voice he had heard in dreams whispered close to his ear.

"Tom, oh, Tom. My son!"

CHAPTER 28

Conclusion

"YASACAMA didn't intend to let any of us get away."

It was Whiz Walton speaking as he sat in the arcade of the Grand Hotel with the keenly interested proprietor, Miguel Lopez.

It was several weeks since Tom had found his father in the depths of the jungle country.

"Those Jivaros," the reporter went on, "intended to treat us just as they treated Hamilton Quest when he won fame as a brujo ten years ago."

"How did he win fame, señor?"

"He had a few things with him when he was captured. Some trade goods, an electric flashlight, a watch, a cigar lighter and a few things of that sort. He managed to impress Yasacama with those things and a few sleight-of-hand tricks. He knew enough about medicine to take care of the Indians when they were sick, so he built quite a reputation as a witch doctor, but it was nothing

like the impression Gulliver made with his fireworks."

"You say these Indians were not going to let you leave their village?"

Whiz nodded and said, "That's right. For ten years they had kept a guard around Hamilton Quest. There wasn't a chance for him to escape. Yasacama expected to do the same thing with Gulliver." The reporter grinned. "But you should have seen what we did."

"How did you escape?"

"Well, Gulliver made believe he was perfectly willing to stay. Then he told the chief he couldn't be bothered by the old witch doctor. He told him he'd have to use some magic to get rid of Hamilton Quest. Yasacama was agreeable to that."

"What did he do, señor?"

"He had several red and green torches left from his assortment of fireworks and a few cans of magnesium powder."

"Eh?" The hotel proprietor looked puzzled.

"Magnesium powder is the stuff photographers used to use to take pictures. It burns with a blinding white light."

"Oh, sí, sí."

"He and Tom Quest spread the powder along the ground in a semicircle to enclose the hut where Quest had been living and all of the Indians. Every few yards, they dumped a little pile of red fire powder. Then they took the rest of Gulliver's blasting powder and put it in Quest's hut. When they were all set, Gulliver got together a few cans of condensed food and stuck them under his shirt. Tom's father collected his notes and then we were ready.

"Gulliver gave Yasacama a lecture and told him his magic would get rid of the old witch doctor. Then he said it would go beyond that point." Whiz Walton chuckled. "I never will forget the expression on Yasacama's face when Quest translated what Gulliver had said and elaborated on it. He told the natives that the spirits might be angry with Gulliver and that, if so, the magic would make all four of us white men disappear. Well, it sure made us disappear. When Gulliver lighted that powder, it made a regular wall of blinding white and red fire. Then there was an explosion that knocked the hut of Jatun-Jatun Curaca to smithereens. The Indians were blinded for quite a few minutes. By the time they got through blinking we were well on our way back here to Guayaquil."

"You mean, señor," Lopez asked in surprise, "the four of you came through the jungle without guides?"

"The return trip wasn't bad at all. We had already cut the path, so we simply followed our own back trail. Hamilton Quest is a lot stronger than he looks. He's thin, but he's mighty wiry."

The Grand Hotel was gaily decorated on that day. Flags of Ecuador, Peru, and the United States hung side by side over the doorway to honor dignitaries who had come from the capital cities of Quito and Lima. These government officials had been in conference with Hamilton Quest for over three hours.

"They should be finished pretty soon," observed Whiz Walton, looking at his watch. "I'm wondering if—"

The reporter was interrupted by confusion in the street outside. Several cars came to skidding halts.

"Holy mackerel," Whiz exclaimed. "What's that?"

A number of men lugging heavy cases came into the arcade and proceeded to set up microphones.

"What's going on here?" Whiz demanded.

"It is the radio," smiled Lopez. "I thought you knew."

"I didn't know anything about a broadcast."

"Oh, sí, sí. The men were here this morning."

"They didn't lose any time," observed the reporter. "It was just last night that I filed my story of Quest's return. Hey, you," he cried, turning to one of the radiomen, "what gives? Where does this broadcast go?"

"Far and wide, brother," replied the other. And then he said, "Hey, aren't you Whiz Walton?"

"You're from the States!" exclaimed Whiz.

"Sure thing. Your paper sent me down to handle this job if and when you came out of the jungle with word of Quest. We're going to short-wave him to the States, where the broadcast will be relayed over the combined networks."

Hamilton Quest went on the air one hour later. In his well-modulated voice he told of falling into the hands of the Indians more nearly dead than alive. He spoke with sincere appreciation of the way these savages had nursed him back to health and then told how his simple possessions had been looked upon as magic. He showed no feeling of bitterness toward the Indians who had kept him prisoner.

"I was found," he continued, "by my own son and two of the most loyal friends a man could have. Fate," he went on, "does strange things. One day an Indian

from another village came into the place where I was held. He spoke to me in English and from him I learned that his people lived near the borders of civilized country. I had with me one thing—a brooch that had belonged to my wife—a brooch shaped like a spiral. I hung it around the neck of this Indian telling him it was good magic and asked him to wear it always. As I look back now, it seems like a million-to-one chance, but at the time I felt that some white man might see that brooch—examine it and question the Indian about it.

"I hoped that it would in some way bring someone to Yasacama's village. It was a slender hope, but it was all I had."

The white-haired scientist explained how a photograph of the Indian wearing that brooch had come into Tom Quest's possession—how the brooch had ultimately led to his rescue. Following Hamilton Quest, representatives of the governments of Ecuador and Peru thanked Tom's father for his contribution to the economic future of those countries. Steps, they said, would be taken to convert the mesa into an airport.

There were other speakers and, as the broadcast neared its end, Gulliver nudged Tom Quest.

"Yo' hear all them things they're sayin' about us, Tom? Doggone, a man could git a swelled head if he listened to much o' this sort o' stuff."

Whiz Walton heard the remark.

"You just wait," he said, "until I get you back to the States. I'll build you up until you won't recognize yourself."

"Yo'll do nothin' o' the kind," retorted Gulliver.

"I'm stoppin' in New York just long enough to git my jeep. Then me an' Tom an' Tom's paw are headin' for my ranch in Texas where there's room enough to spread my loop. Ain't that so, Tom?"

"How about it, Dad?"

Hamilton Quest smiled. "I'd like to stop off in Florida on our way. There's a puzzle there I've long wanted to solve."

Not one of them realized that it would be a long time before any of them saw Texas again.

The man who had been speaking finished. The announcer turned to Whiz and Tom.

"We'd like to have a few words from you," he said.

When they both shook their heads the announcer looked at Gulliver.

"How about you, Gulliver? Have you something to say to our audience?"

Gulliver surprised everyone by stepping forward. "Yo' say that there broadcastin' is goin' all over?"

"That's right."

There was an impish glint in the big man's homely face.

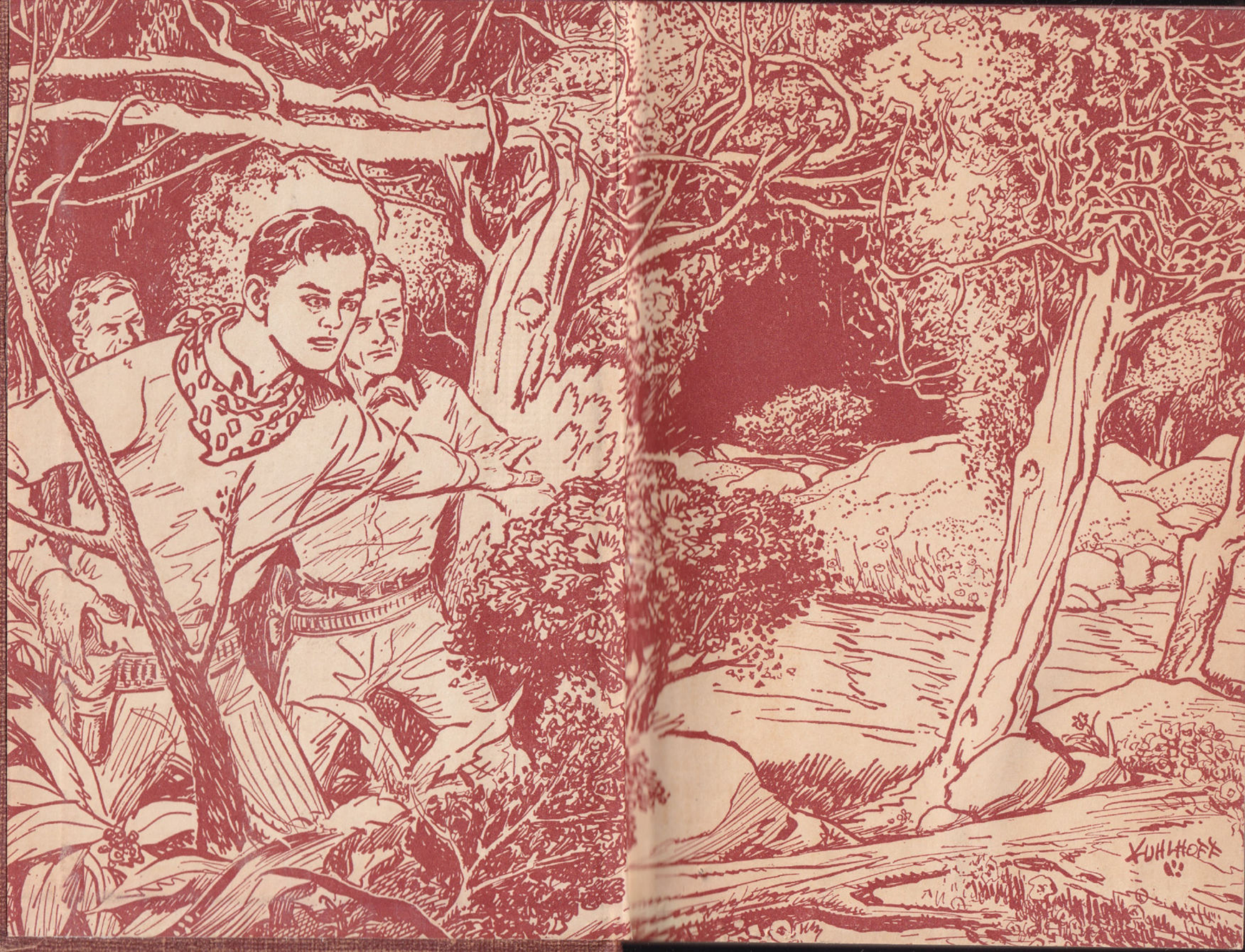
"I might have a mite to say."

He stepped forward to the microphone and gave his belt a hitch, then cleared his throat explosively.

"Yo', Yasacama!" he boomed, and then stepped back and grinned. "If that fat jughead was alistenin'," he chuckled, "I bet I made him jump ten feet."

And though he never knew it, Gulliver was right.

TOM QUEST continues his exciting adventures in the next volume, **THE CLUE OF THE CYPRESS STUMP.** Don't miss this thrilling story of a treasure hunt in the Everglades.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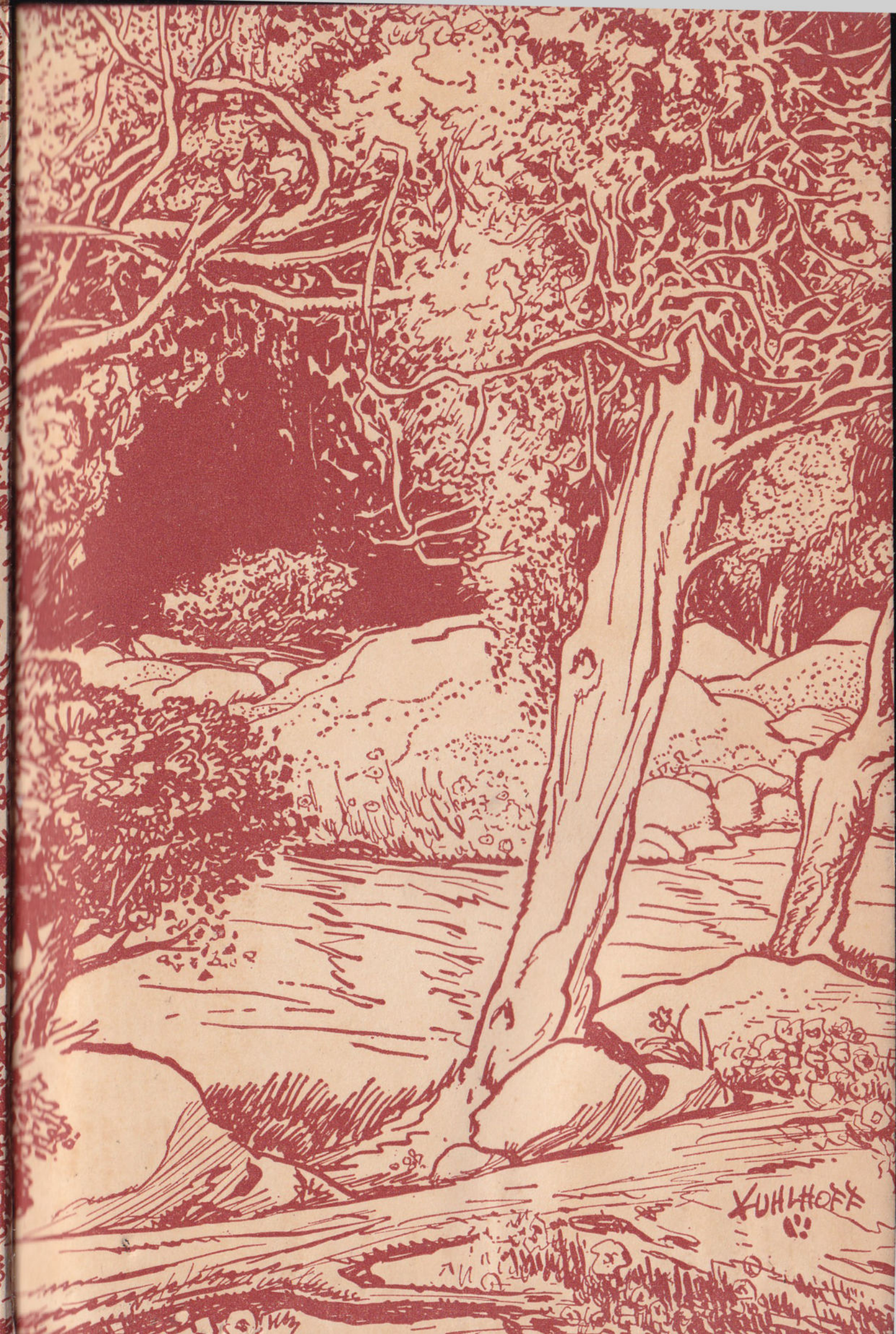
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THE TELLTALE SCAR

FRAN STRIKER

A TOM QUEST

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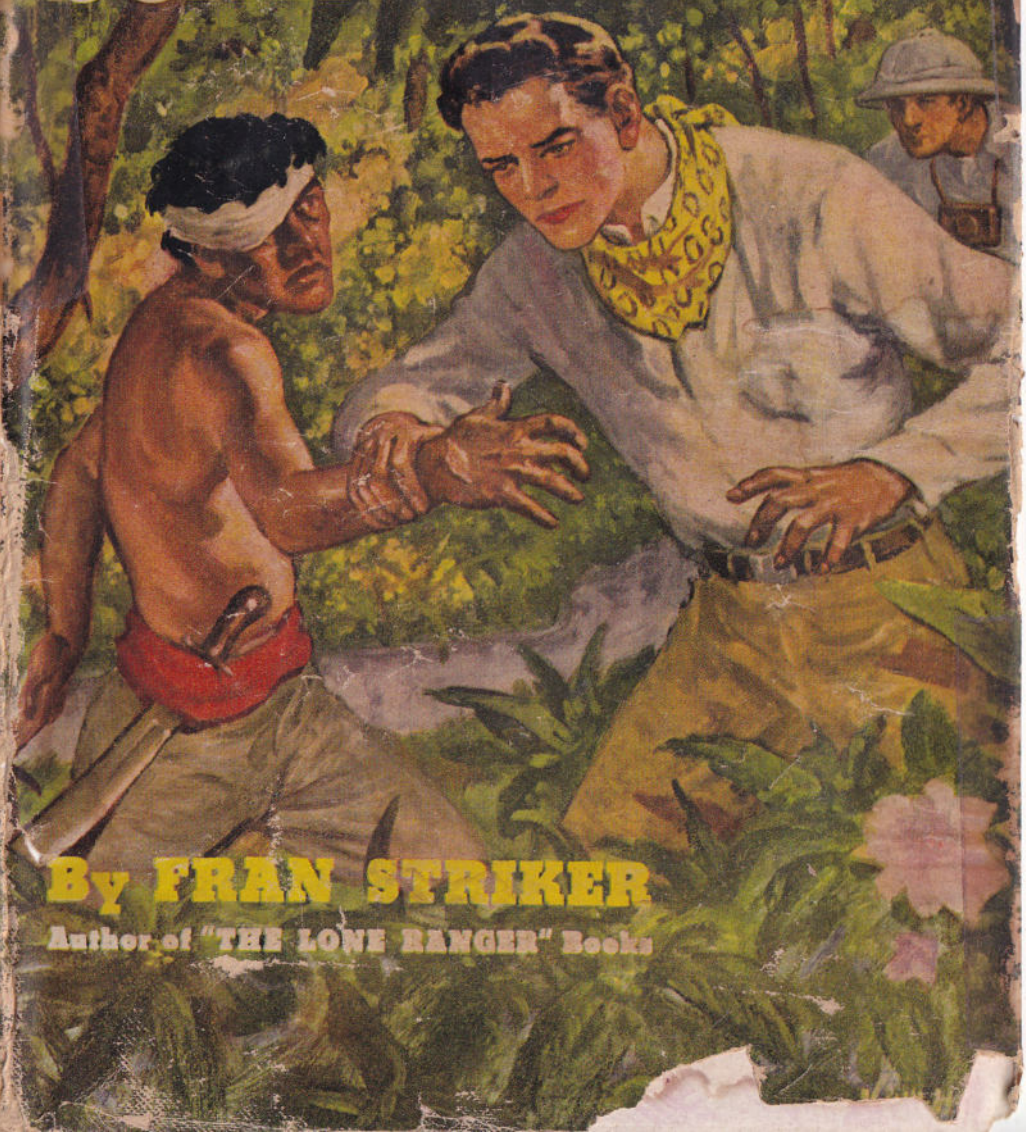

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